

Susanne Schneider

Future Time Reference in English and Italian. A Typologically Guided Comparative Study*

(Work in Progress)

1 Introduction

It is a well-known and perhaps somewhat uncomfortable truth that cross-linguistic grammatical research cannot be carried out by merely confronting the world's languages directly. While all natural languages are undoubtedly capable of expressing the same contents, they do so in various ways, dividing up the semantic space into different manageable categories, which combine to form myriads of language-specific systems.

Scholars interested in language comparison yet need not despair for comparison becomes possible by introducing an intermediate level constituted by what is essentially an external standard, i.e. a *tertium comparationis*, against which language-specific categories may be measured. The creation of this inter-linguistically constructed yardstick has been one of the major goals pursued by linguistic typologists, whose continual efforts have resulted in the postulation of what are considered to be universal principles and category-types.

Any language comparison thus needs to recognize the existence of three distinct levels available to semantic description, namely the underlying fundamental level constituted by the universal conceptual space, the intermediate level of the postulated cross-linguistic category-types and the specific level of the diverse language-particular

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forms.¹ This article, focusing on the semantic space and linguistic encoding of time, in particular of futurity, explicitly adopts this three-level structure and tests the efficiency of this theoretical framework by contrasting the linguistic expressions of futurity in two specific languages, namely English and Italian. By collecting information about these languages within the general reference frame provided by typology, we will not only be able to conduct a soundly based comparison, but we also develop a descriptive template which can be applied as a versatile tool in cross-linguistic and contrastive research.

2 (Future) Time in Human Conception and Speech

Time is an integral part of human self-awareness. We conceive of ourselves as being located within an ever-moving present (*nunc*)² from which we observe and experience time as a continuous uni-directional change. Our apprehension of time in consciousness is based on our direct sensual perception of the events that happen around us. Time, in fact, does not exist as a tangible object, but rather constitutes a constructed *ens rationis*, resulting from our capacity of integrating every present state of affairs on the one hand with the traces that experience has left imprinted on our memory, and, on the other hand, with the happenings that our imagination creates by visualizing either the continuation or the interruption of the present situation. As Aristotle observed: “But when we notice the before and after, we say there is time; for time is the number of change in respect of before and after [Aristotle Physics, 219^a 30, in: Ross (1936:386)].

The conceptualization of time is thus one of the basics of human cognition that supplies us with a reference frame by means of which we are able to orient ourselves in the world and to sort our experiences chronologically. In thought, we subdivide time into discrete spheres, giving prominence to the short interval of our immediate sensual experience, i.e. the present, which, functioning as a threshold, results in a bifurcation of the temporal continuum into everything that happened before, i.e. the past, and

¹ This three-level structure in general theory is described in various typological studies, amongst which Dahl (1985:34), Bybee et al. (1994:47/48), Ramat (1987:14; 2005:22), Raible (2001:20) and Premper (2001:478).

² Le Poidevin (2004) stresses the fact that the experienced present is really a ‘specious’ present, i.e. not a durationless moment but an interval of time that includes an earlier and a later part. Vicario (2005:130), listing ‘tempo di presenza psichico’ and ‘presente fenomenico’ as alternative terms for essentially the same phenomenon, fixes its duration at approximately one second (ibid.:150).

everything that will happen after it, i.e. the future. Yet, though we subsume all three of these entities under the common term ‘time’, they are essentially different in nature.

Vicario (2005:48-49) makes the following observation:

“Noi chiamiamo “tempo” sia la stratificazione dei ricordi, sia l’avvicinarsi dei fogli della nostra agenda, ma proprio questo è il problema: perché usiamo lo stesso nome per denotare cose palesemente differenti, da un lato la solida esperienza dell’attimo fuggente e dall’altro l’immobilità dei ricordi e la fata Morgana delle nostre aspettative?”

In fact, we all know that while the past can be known and described by solid facts and the present can be perceived directly, the future is rather indeterminate, holding nothing but possibilities of which there can exist no (present) records. This epistemological difference has clear effects on the ways in which we approach factual past, immediate present and possible future events: only the latter, yet uncertain and undefined, are inextricably bound up with our will to influence their outcome in a desired fashion. So strong indeed is the link between futurity (FTY) and other than purely temporal nuances of meaning, that we can hardly visualize any future event without charging it with additional semantic features that hint at our attitude towards or opinion about the envisioned situations, though, arguably, something close to pure temporal futurity may be involved in mere predictions about the future. The following graphic³ summarizes notions a common correlate of which is the anticipation of future situations:

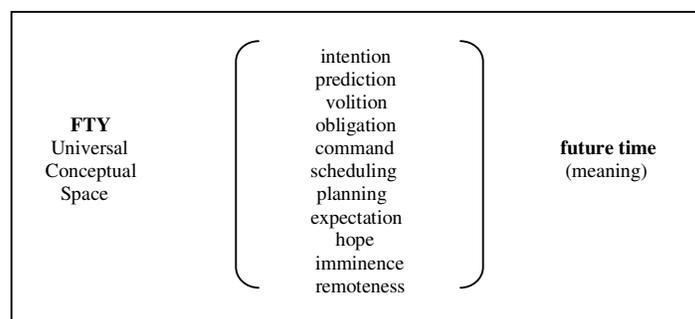


Fig.1: The Conceptual Space of Futurity

Not only is time conceptualized by our minds, but it is also processed linguistically one way or another by all human languages. It is indeed a generally accepted postulate that “all cognitive experience and its classification is conveyable in any existing

³ The design of this graphic is the result of an intuitive association process which roots in a phenomenon that Bache (1997:46) describes as follows: “Basically, as we have seen, we can say that both as linguists and as native speakers we are equipped with the ‘set of humanly conceivable notions’....”

language” (Jakobson, 1959:263). Consequently, there can be no language that could not express elements so fundamental to human experience such as time. Typologists have long been attracted to the question of how exactly the world’s languages come to terms with the conceptual category of time. Their studies revealed a cross-linguistic predilection for the encoding of temporal information as grammatical categories on the verb, collectively referred to by the acronym ATAM (Actionality / Temporality / Aspectuality / Modality).⁴ In addition, it has been argued that language tends to mirror the tripartite conceptual subdivision of the temporal continuum, most typically supplying grammatical means for the expression of “simple anteriority, simultaneity and posteriority, i.e. with the present moment as deictic centre, past, present and future” (Comrie 1985:11), the latter of which we are going to be concerned with in what follows.

3 Future Time Reference: A Typological Phenomenon

As we have shown, futurity is a concept fundamental to human thinking. Future situations are available to us through our imagination and are the constituent parts of our intentions, predictions, expectations, etc. Naturally, invoking the cognitive postulate that all thought is conveyable linguistically, language should provide means that aptly express our projections towards the future. The identification and description of such linguistic tools has been one of the major aims of a number of typological studies, among which Ultan (1978), Dahl (1985) and Bybee et al. (1991/1994) are of particular interest and will form the basis for our discussion of future time reference as a typological phenomenon.

Extrapolating from various analyses of different language samples, typologists discovered that futurity is one of the temporal meanings most commonly grammaticalized in the world’s languages.⁵ What is more, they showed convincingly that markers of future time reference tend to originate from a rather restricted set of

⁴ The acronym ATAM, first introduced by Bertinetto & Noccetti (cf. this volume) as a substitute for the more traditional TAM (or ATM), is adopted here for its virtue of paying due attention to the importance of actionality as one of the four dimensions constituting the semantic domain of verbal time.

⁵ In fact, as Abraham & Janssen (1989b:14) note: “Die überwiegende Zahl der grammatischen Formen für Tempus- und Aspektausdrücke (nämlich 70% bis 80%) betrifft die folgenden sechs Formtypen: (a) Perfektiv...; (b) Imperfektiv...; (c) Progressiv...; (d) Futur...; (e) Vergangenheit..., und (f) Perfekt...”

typically non-temporal sources, namely from lexical items indicating the modal notions of intention, volition and obligation, from constructions signalling spatial goal-directed movement, and from aspectual markers of progressivity and inchoativity. In the course of a largely similar grammaticalization process⁶, the temporal elements originally inherent in the semantics of these expressions grow stronger. Thus, while the source meanings initially survive as the prototypical core, the range of contexts in which an item is employed expands as new meanings and functions are gathered. This more generalized use of the expression may finally trigger a rearrangement of its semantic core and periphery, thereby creating an item which, being predominantly temporal in function, has but little resemblance to its original source. The degree of grammaticalization an item has reached can be established according to several semantic and formal parameters such as the extent to which its source meaning is retained, its possible employment in newly developed, non-temporal uses and its tendency towards morphological reduction.

Typologists have thus succeeded in identifying a rather well-defined cross-linguistic category-type⁷ underlying the linguistic expression of futurity, which, following a convention introduced in Dahl (1985:34), we will designate using the upper case denomination FUT(URE). As all cross-linguistic category-types, FUT is characterized by a number of morphosyntactic and semantic properties. Focusing on the former, it has frequently been observed that FUT has to be regarded as one of the three most widespread category-types, featuring as either a periphrastic or an about equally probable inflectional expression in nearly all of the world's languages. Syntactically, inflectional morphemes that mark FUT tend to have a wider range of uses than their periphrastic counterparts, in that, if at all, only the former may appear in some of the canonical contexts that are typically quite late in becoming available to an explicit encoding of future time reference and in which, consequently, time reference is less systematically marked. These syntactic environments include certain types of

⁶ Cumulative paths illustrating the development of markers of future time reference in the world's languages are suggested in Ultan (1978:115), Bybee et al. (1994:240f) and Ziegeler (2006:265). See also Bybee (2003) for a thorough description of the cognitive processes involved in grammaticalization.

⁷ 'Cross-linguistic category-type' and 'universal category' are the terms used in Dahl (1985:2; 1985:103, respectively), while in Bybee et al. (1991:18; 1994:2/3) the term 'gram-type', based on the shortened form 'gram' for 'grammatical morpheme', is preferred.

subordinate clauses, most notably temporal and conditional ones. There are, however, also other contexts in which FUT is absent for other reasons than syntactic constraints. In fact, future time reference constitutes an area where competition exists not only between forms that are either marked or unmarked for this very feature, but also between two or more grammatical devices indicating future time reference, which differ more or less subtly in their semantics. The often cited inconsistency of explicit marking of future time reference is therefore due to the existence of various alternative devices, namely unmarked forms or present tenses (DEFAULT) and other cross-linguistic category-types such as PROG(RESSIVE), PROSP(ECTIVE) and PRED(ICTATIVE)⁸, which are obligatorily or optionally used in certain contexts of future time reference.

Focusing on the semantic properties of FUT, which are claimed to be cross-linguistically similar, typologists have argued for its resembling a prototypical structure consisting of a core and a non-randomly associated periphery. While the focal meanings, namely prediction, intention and perhaps also planning, are typically shared by all language-specific realizations of FUT, languages may vary considerably with respect to the peripheral meanings they choose to associate with their morphological markers of FUT. In addition, the semantic grounds covered by FUT are likely to be further extended due to its widespread propensity to develop new, non-temporal meanings, the most frequent of which appears to be the expression of predictions or inferences about what are strictly non-future situations. FUT, thus, is likely to occur in modal contexts of epistemicity (EPSMY).⁹

The above observations may now be given the following graphical representation, which allows us to summarize the main properties of FUT in a systematic and easily accessible way:

⁸ Just like the denomination FUT(URE), these labels are adopted from Dahl (1985:110-112), who defines the semantics of these tentative cross-linguistic category-types, all of which are known to have exclusively periphrastic language-specific realizations, as follows: while PRED may be used for predictions that do not have any intentional element, PROSP and PROG may cover contexts of planning.

⁹ Bertinetto (1979:98) distinguishes two different epistemic sub-notions, namely the ‘inferential’ and the ‘conjectural’, depending on the degree of the speaker’s commitment towards the actual future realization of the envisaged situation, which is defined as being stronger with inferential statements. In what follows, however, we will subsume both sub-notions under the umbrella-term ‘conjectures’.

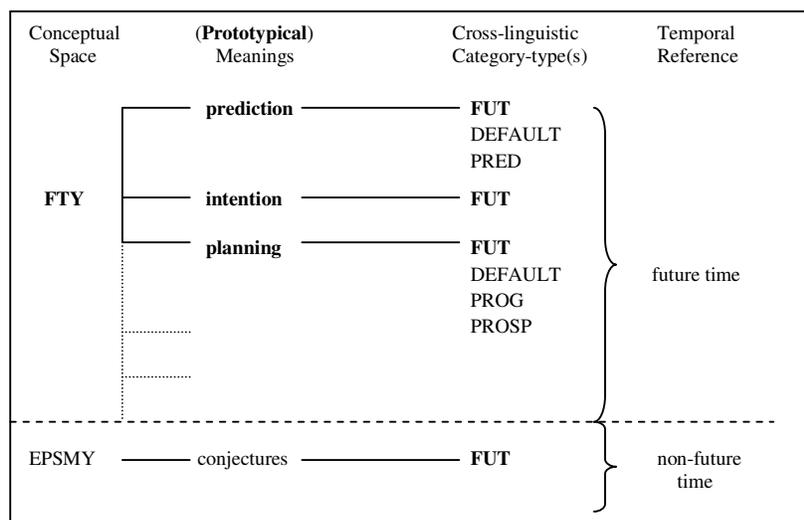


Fig.2: The Cross-linguistic Category-type FUT as part of the Conceptual Space of Futurity

Not only does the above figure illustrate precisely how FUT is to be constructed semantically according to typological insight, but it also shows how the universal conceptual space of futurity is more generally dealt with at the cross-linguistic level by including a list of possible alternative means of expression, competing with FUT in some of the contexts of future time reference. Finally, the lower part of the figure documents a widespread additional meaning of markers of FUT, thereby extending the first column to include an adjacent conceptual space.

4 From Typology to Contrastive Linguistics

Relying on the insights gained in the two preceding chapters, we do now have a more precise idea both of how the universal conceptual space of futurity is constructed and of how the cross-linguistic category-type FUT is structured. In particular, what has become clear is that, faced with the task of verbalizing a concept so fundamental to human cognition, interaction and discourse such as futurity, languages tend to adopt a very similar strategy: from a limited set of non-temporal sources, they develop appropriate grammatical devices (FUT), which, manifested in morphologically and syntactically comparable ways, come to be used for the expression of future time reference in a number of prototypical contexts. This, of course, is not to be taken to mean that all of the world’s languages behave accordingly – after all, as we said earlier,

the conceptual space of futurity is just very likely to be at least partially encompassed by the functions of apposite grammatical devices – nor that the semantic similarities shared by the different language-specific realizations of FUT necessarily continue to persist also outside the focal areas. In fact, while typology provides a viable standard parameter, i.e. an external *tertium comparationis*, against which specific languages may be measured and thus compared on methodologically and theoretically sound grounds, a precise description of the meaning of any language-specific realization of FUT can only be arrived at after a detailed, language-particular study, for “grammatical meaning is always language-specific” (Johanson, 2000:45). Consequently, the exact functions of any language-specific grammatical form are defined not only by virtue of the form’s being an instance of a certain cross-linguistic category-type or by its having originated in a given lexical source, but also by the very place it assumes within the specific linguistic system it is part of. Only by analyzing each language in its own terms will it thus be possible to determine how exactly the specific morphological realizations of FUT behave inside and outside the predicted prototypical focus and, subsequently, to establish within a comparative framework in how far the observed characteristics constitute idiosyncratic or shared features regarding the languages selected for comparison.

It is at this point of our argumentation that it becomes most obvious just how powerful a tool we assembled in the preceding chapters, where we considered the conceptualization and cross-linguistic expression of futurity. Falling back upon our graphical illustration of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT (*Fig.2*), we may now actually apply it as a descriptive apparatus to individual languages. By associating the diverse positions of the diagram with the relevant language-specific form terms and morphological forms, we are able to compile a list of the formal inventory present in the languages under scrutiny, matching language-specific expressions and terminology with cross-linguistic category-types and denominations, thereby guaranteeing comparability throughout. The result takes the form of the following descriptive chart:

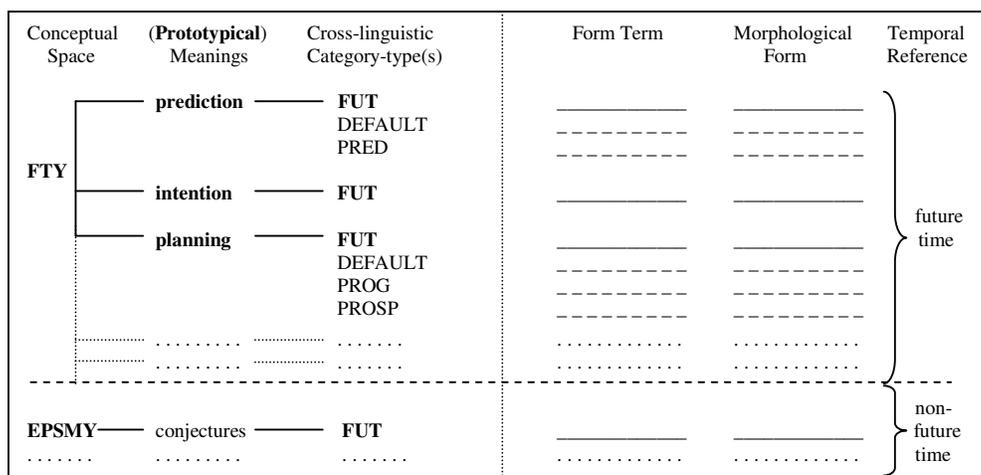


Fig.3: The Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)

Defined as ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’, this chart constitutes a three-level account of futurity in thought and speech, depicting the language-specific grammatical categories that mark FUT in any selected language according to a typological standard, which, in turn, is shown to be rooted in the universal conceptual space of futurity. What is more, the relevant language-specific categories are not reduced to their manifesting instances of an idealized cross-linguistic category-type. Rather, they are associated graphically not only with their prototypical but, after careful study, also with their peripheral meanings, including non-temporal ones, and are represented as part of a network of competing forms, which semantically encompass future time reference while constituting realizations of other cross-linguistic category-types. The graphical representation of the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ is thus to be understood as a zoomed-in section of the vast multi-dimensional semantic space of time, in which various categories extend over delimited areas of meaning and intersections between them do exist.

It is the scope of the following chapter to exemplify how effectively the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ can help us to determine in how far individual languages subdivide the semantic space of time, in particular that of futurity, in a similar or different manner.

5 Future Time Reference in English and Italian: A Comparison

5.1 The ‘Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in English

5.1.1 The English Marker of FUT

Basing our investigation as stipulated on typological research, we may conveniently begin our description of the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in English by applying the descriptive chart presented in the preceding chapter to the English language. As a first step, this procedure will help us to detect the language-specific forms that encompass the prototypical meanings ascribed to the cross-linguistic category–type FUT and to determine which of them resembles the typological standard most closely:

Conceptual Space	(Prototypical) Meanings	Cross-linguistic Category-type(s)	Form Term	Morphological Form	Temporal Reference
FTY	prediction	FUT DEFAULT PRED	<i>will</i> - Future / /	<i>will</i> + Inf. / /	future time
	intention	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	
	planning	(FUT) DEFAULT PROG PROSP	(<i>will</i> - Future) Simple Present Present Progressive <i>be going to</i> - Future	(<i>will</i> + Inf.) - / -s <i>be</i> + Gerund <i>be going to</i>	
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>					
EPSMY	conjectures	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	non- future time

Fig.4: The ‘Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in English – Prototypical Meanings of FUT

Scanning the chart, a pronounced congruence emerges between the meanings covered by the English analytic marker ‘*will* + Inf.’ and the semantic core of the category-type FUT. In fact, this specific morphological form is typically considered as the marker of FUT in English.

Diachronically, ‘*will*’ derives from Proto-Germanic *‘*willan*’ (‘to want’), thus constituting a de-volitive construction.¹⁰ Its lexical source meaning is still rather unambiguously present in the syntactic environment of conditional protases, where the Simple Present constitutes the regular device for expressing future time reference:

¹⁰ This term as well as the later ‘de-obligative’ and ‘de-andative’ are taken from Dahl (2000b:319-322).

- (1) If you **will** drive to school, at least take the small car.¹¹

Willingness is also clearly conveyed in contexts containing a subject's explicit refusal towards the performance of an action (2) as well as in *yes/no*-interrogatives featuring volitional verbs, which are normally understood as expressing invitations (3), offers (4) or requests (5), the latter of which may easily be reinterpreted as implicit commands¹²:

- (2) Mummy, Jane **won't give** me back my bow and arrow.
 (3) **Will** you **come** inside?
 (4) **Will** you **have** some cocoa?
 (5) **Will** you please **stop** shouting?

Even the use of '*will* + Inf.' for intention-based future time reference, which features among the prototypical meanings of FUT, appears to be somehow related to the lexical origins of the construction, stating, as it were, the subject's decision to perform the encoded action at a future time. While the intention typically regards a spontaneous reaction to a present situation (6), '*will* + Inf.' may also be charged with the specific pragmatic value characterizing promises (7):

- (6) I'll just **see** what this bottle does.
 (7) I **will keep** my word.

In addition, there are contexts such as the following, in which a subject's intention encoded by '*will* + Inf.' appears to take the shape of a more precisely fixed and arranged action. These cases appear to be very marginal instances of planning¹³, in which, however, the decision on the plan is presented as unpremeditated, conveying the impression that the plan has only just been made up:

- (8) I **will phone** you tonight around six.

Both volition- and intention-based future time reference are by definition restricted to situations that are considered to be under human control. This changes if prediction-based future time reference is considered, for in making predictions about future time, the speaker simply asserts in a neutral way how s/he envisages the future. Pure predictions are most clearly represented by cases in which the realization of the future situation is determined by external factors that are beyond the speaker's control,

¹¹ The examples of current language use quoted in this article are taken from a vast array of published academic contributions to the topic. Among the main sources, we quote Leech (1971) and Wekker (1976) for the English, and Bertinetto (1986) for the Italian examples.

¹² In this context, it is interesting to note that '*will* + Inf.' appears in standard tags adjoined to Imperatives.

¹³ A glimpse at the descriptive chart at the beginning of this chapter shows that the conceptual category of planning constitutes an area in which English supplies a rather large array of morphological means of expression. The precise description of those devices will be the topic of the following chapter.

prototypical examples of which being weather forecasts (9) and contexts in which a condition assumed about a future situation, though remaining implicit, triggers the prediction of the respective consequence (10):

- (9) Tomorrow it **will be** rainy but warm.
 (10) [Don't go near the puma.] It **'ll bite** you.

Similarly uncontrollable future situations are the ones represented as the contents of hopes. They, however, differ from pure predictions insofar as they explicitly state the subject's attitude towards the actualization of the future situation. In these contexts, '*will + Inf.*' competes with the Simple Present:

- (11) I hope that John **will know** the answer tomorrow.
 (12) And I want to remind you all that inspectors are there to determine whether or not Saddam Hussein is willing to disarm. [...] We hope that he disarms.

It is in these last two contexts, i.e. in the contexts of prediction and hope, that the grammaticalization of '*will + Inf.*' as a morphological marker of future time reference becomes most obvious. In fact, as far as the former notion is concerned, '*will + Inf.*', not having any competing expressions, constitutes an obligatory marking device.

The conjectural meaning, included as the only non-future meaning within the prototypical core of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT, is evidence for the fact that the grammaticalization process has advanced even further. In fact, '*will + Inf.*' is frequently found in conjectural contexts, where it expresses inferences about non-future states of affairs:

- (13) That **'ll be** the postman.

The list of non-future meanings is additionally extended by contexts such as proverbs and formulations of general principles, where '*will + Inf.*', in competition with the Simple Present, expresses gnomic statements true of all time (14), and by narrative texts, in which it may signal posteriority with respect to a shifted orientation time introduced by the historical present (15). In this latter function, '*will + Inf.*' may combine with past time adverbials:

- (14) Boys **will be** boys.
 (15) Napoleon arrives at Saint Helena, where he **will die** in 1821.

In order to arrive at a precise picture of the exact value '*will + Inf.*' assumes within the language-specific system of English, it is now important to go beyond the simple description of the notional categories it covers.

5.1.2 Alternative Markers of Future Time Reference in English

After having identified ‘*will + Inf.*’ as a marker of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT, the next step must thus be to consider the inventory of possible alternative means, which, though they clearly differ from ‘*will + Inf.*’ if their entire semantics are considered, are nevertheless comparable to it insofar as the semantic spaces they cover show partial overlaps with the one encompassed by ‘*will + Inf.*’. It is by including these forms, that the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ becomes the powerful descriptive tool it was defined as earlier.

In addition to the de-volitive construction described above, English possesses a de-obligative marker of future time reference, namely ‘*shall + Inf.*’, a descendant of *‘*sculan*’ (‘to owe’). While this construction covers more or less the same semantic range as ‘*will + Inf.*’, it actually constitutes a rather limited device, being rarely used in British and even more marginally employed in American English. Furthermore, it is largely restricted to the first person, and, consequently, it is only in these contexts that it represents a valid alternative for ‘*will + Inf.*’. Sentences (16) – (18) are examples of the possible interchangeable use of the two devices in the expression of predictions, intentions, and what may be considered marginal instances of planning, respectively:

(16) Perhaps we **will/shall meet** again.

(17) The only relative I know of, Doctor, is a daughter in America. I **will/shall cable** her, naturally.

(18) I **will/shall go** to bed around ten tonight.

These examples show clearly that the set of meanings covered by ‘*shall + Inf.*’ is largely similar to the prototypical meanings defined for the cross-linguistic category-type of FUT. However, in addition to the above-mentioned limitations imposed on its use, there are a number of semantic contexts in which this de-obligative construction, due to the residual persistence of its source meaning, cannot substitute for ‘*will + Inf.*’. As the following example demonstrates, while the use of both ‘*shall + Inf.*’ and ‘*will + Inf.*’ in neutral requests for information about the future is blocked if the question contains an intentional verb, questions containing the former construction additionally differ semantically from those containing the latter, for what is really inquired about in such contexts is the addressee’s opinion about the speaker’s future actions:

(19) What time **shall I be** in Leeds?

The expression of unpremeditated intentions is another example of the contexts in which ‘*shall + Inf.*’ and ‘*will + Inf.*’ cannot be used interchangeably, since only the latter, due to its lexical source meaning, is able to express the volitional component contained in such utterances. If, however, the unpremeditated decision is void of any volitional meaning, ‘*shall + Inf.*’ is not unacceptable:

(20) [“Make up your mind!” – “OK.”] I **will/shall wear** the blue shirt.”

Finally, in formal texts such as legal documents, ‘*shall + Inf.*’ often fully retains its lexical source meaning of obligation:

(21) Every employer **shall pay** to each of his employees who in any workweek is engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce, or is employed in an enterprise engaged in commerce or in the production of goods for commerce, wages at the following rates:

English, as shown in the descriptive chart above, also possesses a de-andative construction that takes part in the expression of future time reference, namely ‘*be going to*’. Derived from a verb of movement, this specific lexical source is still fairly transparent in the morphology of the construction, though a less transparent, reduced form, ‘*gonna*’, exists, which fuses the originally complex construction into a simplex grammatical marker, thereby demonstrating the advanced grammaticalization of the item.¹⁴ As far as the semantics of ‘*be going to*’ is concerned, the original meaning of spatial motion has been obliterated, allowing for this construction to occur in contexts where no movement on the subject’s part is implied:

(22) I’**m going to** do the paperwork myself in the future.

Combined with a first person subject agent such as in the example above, ‘*be going to*’ typically expresses the speaker’s premeditated intention about what s/he proposes to do in the future. In some contexts, even a sense of strong determination on the speaker’s part may emerge:

(23) I’**m going to** keep talking to him until he changes his mind.

The implication of premeditated future actions carries over to instances of ‘*be going to*’ with second and third person subjects. Consequently, in combination with agentive verbs, this construction generally implies the existence of a conscious decision and/or definite plan:

¹⁴ Bybee (2003:146), tracing the development of ‘*be going to*’ in her presentation of the theory of grammaticalization, mentions that this originally complex construction “even reduces further in some contexts to [ənə] as in *I’**m** (g)onna [aimənə]*.” Labov (1970:31), tracing a number of different ‘routes of condensation of *I am going to*’, registers twenty-three reduced variants of this construction.

(24) Cheryl **is going to** marry Gordon when she has graduated.

If ‘*be going to*’ does not refer to a present intention or plan, it generally implies that the speaker is making a prediction about the future which is based on present evidence. The future situation is thus presented as being rooted in the present, i.e. as having a present cause or origin:

(25) Oh no! Betty’s **going to** sing. [*Betty has taken the microphone.*]

Due to the visualization of the future situation as contingent on the present state of affairs, ‘*be going to*’ usually implies a strong expectation or even certainty on the speaker’s part that the future situation will come about (26), which, in certain contexts, may result in a notion of inevitability (27):

(26) Tom **is going to** give you the money.

(27) We **are going to** miss the train.

The embedding of this construction under verbs of hope and belief, which underline the uncertainty entertained by the subject towards the actualization of the future situation, is therefore generally impossible:

(28) ?? He believes that he **is going to** marry a rich woman.

It is important to note that the property of ‘*be going to*’ to represent future actions as related to the present state of affairs results in a frequent interpretation of the encoded situations as lying in the immediate or proximate future (29).¹⁵ This implication may, however, be cancelled by temporal adverbials, contextual and/or pragmatic information that suggest the location of the relevant situation in the more remote future (30):

(29) We’re **going to** have the chimney repaired.

(30) If Winterbottom’s calculations are correct, this planet **is going to** burn itself out 200,000,000 years from now.

Interestingly, there are contexts in which future situations encoded by means of ‘*be going to*’ seem to be less dependent on present evidence. Rather, the prevision of their future actualization appears to be rooted in world knowledge. In such examples, the fact that the situation is asserted to be true of a future time appears to be the most salient piece of information supplied:

(31) These trees **are going to** lose their leaves.

¹⁵ Since the definition of the ‘*be going to*’ construction as a marker of ‘immediate future’ is standard practice in numerous reference grammars, linguists such as Fleischman (1983:188) have repeatedly emphasized that “...constructions associated with this label – which typically involve the ‘go’ verb with an infinitive – are in no sense restricted to marking situations in the *near* future,....”

It is in these contexts of pure prediction that ‘*be going to*’ seems to come closest semantically to ‘*will + Inf.*’, the English marker of FUT. This rather neutral way of referring to the future is also clearly present in *yes/no*-interrogatives, in which, by contrast, both ‘*will + Inf.*’ and ‘*shall + Inf.*’ exhibit modal nuances resulting from the residual persistence of their respective source meanings. Simple questions about future actions are therefore normally formed by using ‘*be going to*’:

(32) **Are you going to** have a word with Tom?

While English thus possesses three specialized morphological devices for marking future time reference, there are certain contexts in which none of them is used and the encoding of the future situation is achieved by means that are not explicitly marked for future time. One of these is constituted by the Simple Present (DEFAULT), which typically occurs with future events that are located in the vicinity of the present and assumed to be predetermined by some, often unspecified, authority or circumstances. By conferring to the future the certainty that is generally attributed only to present states of affairs, the Simple Present depicts future actions as facts or immutable events, the actualization of which is considered to be outside the speaker’s control. In this function, however, the Simple Present is only acceptable if the context and/or pragmatic knowledge supply sufficient indication of the fact that the situation referred to should be interpreted as belonging to future time. Consequently, if referring to future situations, the Simple Present is usually accompanied by future time adverbials. The following sentences are examples of some of the most typical contexts, including statements about the calendar (33), reference to events that are determined by a definite agreement, plan or arrangement already existing at the moment of utterance (34), and timetable announcements (35):

(33) Tuesday of next week **is** 21st August.

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

(35) The first train to Leipzig **leaves** at 6 a.m.

There are also a number of syntactic contexts which trigger the use of the Simple Present for future time reference. In addition to the possible use of the Simple Present for the expression of desired future situations in complement clauses of verbs of hoping, which we mentioned in the preceding chapter, temporal and conditional subordinate clauses are syntactic environments that, blocking the occurrence of future-referring ‘*will*

+ Inf.’¹⁶, typically employ the Simple Present in order to designate what are essentially future situations:

- (36) I’ll tell you as soon as I **know**.
 (37) If it **rains** tomorrow, we’ll stay home.

The Progressive (PROG) constitutes yet another means of referring to future time. Taking the morphological form of the Present Progressive, it presents future situations as resulting from present plans or arrangements. In contrast to the Simple Present, however, this device implies that the actualization of the future situations referred to lies within the subjects’ control, i.e. that the subjects themselves are responsible for the existing plans, which thus appear to be still alterable:

- (38) Margaret **is dining** out tonight.

In addition, used with verbs referring to punctual events, i.e. achievement verbs in Vendler’s terminology, the Present Progressive, focusing on the preliminary stages of situations of this specific actionality, represents the subject as located in the preparatory phase just before the actual realization of the situation, which is thus perceived as lying in the future:

- (39) I’**m leaving**!

If combined with ‘*will + Inf.*’, the Progressive, on the one hand, may be used to express true future progressivity, i.e. it may represent a situation as being in progress at a future vantage point:

- (40) When you reach the end of the bridge, I’**ll be waiting** there for you.

On the other hand, however, the Future Progressive sometimes occurs in contexts which, being void of progressive meaning, represent a future situation as being part of the expected natural course of events. Implying that the encoded future situation will be actualized anyway as a matter of routine, the emerging pragmatic meaning is that of habituality and/or politeness:

- (41) Bill **will be driving** to London on Thursday.

¹⁶ Although this appears to be a rather strict syntactic constraint, authors such as Hornstein (1990:214) and Declerck (1991:103) quote examples of temporal subordinate clauses containing ‘*will + Inf.*’ which they judge as “not horrendous” and as accepted by some speakers, respectively. With respect to conditional clauses, Comrie (1985:120) and Davidsen-Nielsen (1988:10) note that in this specific syntactic environment, ‘*will + Inf.*’ may appear if the conditioning event temporally succeeds the event described in the main clause and, as Comrie (ibid.) adds, if there exists a causal relation from the main to the subordinate clause.

In addition to the morphological means described above, several constructions can be singled out which incorporate the notion of future time in their semantics. In particular, we can distinguish the Prospective Periphrases ‘*be about to*’ (42) and ‘*be on the point of*’ (43), which, stating the subject’s present propensity to perform the encoded action, typically refer to an immediate, yet perhaps not inevitable, future situation:

(42) He **is about to** leave.

(43) Grey squirrels have now reached plague proportions in many parts of the country, and in Northumberland and Scotland **are on the point of** eliminating the last healthy populations of red squirrels.

By contrast, future situations expressed by means of the auxiliary ‘*be to*’ are usually considered as inevitable and carefully prearranged, for, being part of an official schedule, they are understood to be imposed by an external will (44):

(44) The ambassador **is to** return to Egypt tomorrow.

In the protases of future-referring conditional sentences, ‘*be to*’ may also express a situation whose future actualization is envisaged as a possible and attainable goal that is worth pursuing (45). In colloquial speech, ‘*be going to*’ may be used to the same effect (46):

(45) If we **are to** be effective and authentic, Oxfam staff, volunteers and supporters must function as an integrated movement.

(46) You should try and get your articles published in better scientific journals if you’re **going to** become a name in the academic world.

Finally, obligations and commands expressed by means of ‘*have to*’ and by means of Imperative constructions, respectively, generally refer to actions located after the moment of utterance, thus achieving future time reference as a by-product:

(47) I **have to** go home.

(48) **Do** as I say!

Having made an inventory of the forms which are used to convey the notion of futurity in English, and having described in more detail the exact meanings they cover, we are now able to complete our graphical representation of the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in English as shown in *Fig.5* (cf. appendix).¹⁷

¹⁷ The two descriptive charts provided in the appendix summarize the results of an extensive study of future time reference in English and Italian based on secondary data. They are essentially open and can easily be extended should primary data supply further facts on language use. Formally, the charts contain a number of abbreviations, which are decoded in the lower part of the chart itself. The meaning labels, which, reduced to short upper case denominations, are contained in the column listing the ‘cross-linguistic category-types’, have been adopted in part from Dahl (1985:ix), in part from Bybee et al. (1994:316-324). The use of the latter, however, is still provisional and their adequacy remains subject to further research. This explains why, in the chart, they appear in square brackets.

5.2 The ‘Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in Italian

5.2.1 The Italian Marker of FUT

In describing the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in Italian, it is most convenient to proceed analogously to our investigation of English in the preceding chapter. As a first step, we thus apply our standard descriptive chart to the Italian language, obtaining the following figure:

Conceptual Space	(Prototypical) Meanings	Cross-linguistic Category-type(s)	Form Term	Morphological Form	Temporal Reference
FTY	prediction	FUT DEFAULT PRED	Futuro Semplice Presente /	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm /	future time
	intention	FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	
	planning	FUT DEFAULT (PROG) PROSP	Futuro Semplice Presente (Perifrasi Progressiva) (<i>stare</i> + Gerundio) /	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm (<i>stare</i> + Gerundio) /	
<hr style="border-top: 1px dashed black;"/>					
EPSMY	conjectures	FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	non- future time

Fig.6: The ‘Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in Italian – Prototypical Meanings of FUT

Scrutinizing the chart, we realize that the synthetic Futuro Semplice¹⁸, which is typically considered as the marker of FUT in Italian, does indeed cover all of the meanings that constitute the semantic core of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT.

Diachronically, the Futuro Semplice derives from Latin ‘Inf. + *habēo*’ (‘I have to’), a periphrastic de-obligative future construction which, originally expressing pure modal meaning, entered the grammaticalization process, in the course of which some components of its original lexical meaning were lost, while its temporal properties were strengthened. In Early Romance, the analytic form also reduced morphologically to become a fixed inflection and it succeeded in fully replacing the Latin synthetic Future.

¹⁸ The Futuro Semplice is formed from the future stem of the verb to which a regular set of inflectional suffixes, identical for all conjugational classes and derived from the present tense of Latin ‘*habēre*’, is attached.

The meanings the Futuro Semplice encompasses are evidence of its highly advanced degree of grammaticalization. On the one hand, it regularly expresses prediction-based future time reference, encoding neutral assertions about future situations:

- (49) Al mattino il cielo **sarà** sereno con Borino sulla costa. In giornata il cielo **sarà** poco nuvoloso per la possibile formazione di stratificazioni ad alta quota e il vento **si attenuerà**. Con il trascorrere delle ore **aumenterà** la nuvolosità, specie sulle zone prealpine.

On the other hand, the future time reference expressed by the Futuro Semplice may merge with a variety of modal notions. Intentionality is a case in point. It is typically achieved in first person utterances in which the speakers either state their own intentions (50), or demonstrate their refusals to perform the encoded actions (51):

- (50) Domani **verrò**.
 (51) Non **sarò** io a chiedere il divorzio.

The Futuro Semplice may convey the subject's intentions even if these take the shape of more definite plans. In fact, the relevant future actions may be prearranged and precisely programmed:

- (52) **Verrò** a trovarvi il 12 ottobre.

If planning already implies a rather high degree of (subjective) certainty towards the actualization of a future action, the Futuro Semplice also occurs in contexts of what may be called 'objective certainty'. Consequently, it may feature in statements about the calendar (53), refer to officially predetermined situations (54), and appear in official announcements of scheduled events (55):

- (53) Venerdì prossimo **sarà** il 13 agosto, l'onomastico dello zio Olli.
 (54) Gli esami si **terranno** il 5 giugno in Aula Magna.
 (55) Il presidente degli Stati Uniti **verrà** in visita ufficiale la seconda settimana di marzo.

The Futuro Semplice may also encode volition-based future time reference. Volitional meaning usually surfaces in contexts in which the envisaged situations, being beyond the speakers' control, cannot actually be the subject of any serious intention, but rather embody the contents of the speakers' desires:

- (56) Domani **vincerò** un terno al lotto.

Hopes convey a similarly positive and wishful attitude which is entertained by the speaker towards the future situation referred to:

- (57) Spero che **verrà**.

Marginally, the Futuro Semplice may also be used to express obligations. The following example shows that, combined with a second person subject, the Futuro Semplice may suggest an imperative reading:

(58) Domani gli **andrai** a chiedere scusa, siamo intesi?

A similarly deontic meaning clearly surfaces in statements which, pronouncing obligations that are essentially imposed by law (59) or by the more general rules of society (60), order the addressee to behave in the indicated way:

(59) D'ora innanzi, i trasgressori **pagheranno** il doppio della penale fissata in precedenza.

(60) Non **ucciderai**.

The fact that the Futuro Semplice is also found in the specific syntactic environments of temporal (61) and conditional subordinate clauses (62), where it is used to designate what are essentially future situations, has to be interpreted as yet another indication of the advanced stage this form has reached in the grammaticalization process:

(61) Se **verrai**, ci **farai** piacere.

(62) Te lo dirò appena lo **saprò**.

In addition to the future-referring functions described above, the Futuro Semplice may assume a number of non-future meanings. While the expression of inferences about non-future states of affairs (63) features most prominently amongst these uses, statements of eternal truths (64) are a decidedly more marginal context for the Futuro Semplice to occur in, with the Presente constituting the more frequent choice:

(63) In questo momento **saranno** le 4.

(64) Due più due **farà** sempre quattro.

Finally, the Futuro Semplice can be optionally employed in historical and biographical narratives, where it may encode a posteriority relation calculated from the situation previously described in the text. In these contexts, the Futuro Semplice, being restricted to third person subjects, competes with the Condizionale Passato, which generally substitutes for it in the first and second, and often also in the third persons:

(65) ... così egli si iscrisse a medicina. In seguito **lascerà** gli studi per dedicarsi al commercio.

As the above observations have shown, the Futuro Semplice does not only cover all of the prototypical meanings ascribed to the cross-linguistic category-type FUT, but it has also developed a large variety of additional future and non-future meanings. What remains to be determined is the exact position it holds within the 'meta-category of

FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’. By no longer disregarding possible alternative means for referring to future time, this next step will help us to determine the true functional load carried by the Italian marker of FUT.

5.2.2 Alternative Markers of Future Time Reference in Italian

Analyzing the alternative markers of future time reference in Italian, what becomes immediately obvious is the fact that these devices may substitute for the Futuro Semplice in almost all of its meanings. One of the major strategies is represented by the Presente (DEFAULT), which may easily replace most of the explicit markers of future time reference if the temporal location of the encoded situation is sufficiently indicated by adverbials, contextual and/or pragmatic information. Especially in spoken colloquial Italian, the Presente clearly prevails over the Futuro Semplice in future contexts. The following sentences are examples of the Presente expressing an intended, a planned, a scheduled and a predicted future situation, respectively:

- (66) Domani **vado** a trovare Paolo.
- (67) Fra quindici giorni **parto** per Milano.
- (68) Il treno **parte** questo pomeriggio alle 3.
- (69) Lasciamoli che prendano il potere. Così si **smascherano** al cento per cento.

In each of these examples, the Presente seems to imply and perhaps even to insist on the speaker’s certainty towards the future actualization of the envisaged situation. In fact, it can be observed that the Presente is not usually felicitous in utterances that involve a very low degree of certainty on the speaker’s part:

- (70) “Quando **parte** Paolo?” “Non lo so con esattezza, partirà / (??) **parte** domani, come al solito.

Thus, the choice of the Presente instead of the Futuro Semplice appears to imply a greater commitment on the speaker’s part that the designated situation will actually take place in the future. The same observation applies to instances of the Presente in conditional sentences, where it may express both the condition and the consequence of a future-referring hypothesis:

- (71) Se non **smetti** di giocare con quel bastone, te lo **rompo**.

It finally should be mentioned that the Presente occurs naturally with punctual events which are explicitly indicated as being very close to the moment of utterance. In utterances such as the one below, a pronounced notion of imminence is undoubtedly present:

(72) **Arrivo** subito, abbi pazienza!

The Congiuntivo Presente has to be listed as a syntactically determined alternative to the Futuro Semplice. Not primarily encompassing future semantics, it takes part in the encoding of future time reference in precisely determinable contexts, where it either constitutes an optional or an obligatory substitute for the Italian marker of FUT. Among the optional contexts, we register complement clauses of verbs of hoping (73), whereas its use after certain temporal subordinating conjunctions is indeed obligatory (74):

(73) Spero che **venga**.

(74) Prima che **esca**, gli parlerò.

In addition to these two major alternative devices, a number of minor strategies can be distinguished which, though incorporating future time in their semantics, simultaneously convey distinctive additional notions, which is why they cannot usually be considered as general strategies for future time reference. In particular, there are several periphrases, namely ‘*stare per + Inf.*’, ‘*essere sul punto di + Inf.*’, ‘*essere in procinto di + Inf.*’, and ‘*accingersi a + Inf.*’, which refer to imminent future situations:

(75) Il ticket d'ingresso **sta per** diventare realtà.

(76) Bush **è sul punto di** attaccare l'Iran.

(77) Gli scienziati europei **sono in procinto di** sviluppare infermieri-robot.

(78) La Galbani **si accinge a** produrre mozzarelle in Slovacchia.

Furthermore, the Imperativo (79) and the construction ‘*dovere + Inf.*’ (80) frequently express obligations that essentially lie in the future:

(79) **Devo** preparare un discorso di presentazione in inglese di 5min per un colloquio di lavoro.

(80) **Mangia** questa pizza!

Finally, it is interesting to note that, at least in certain regional varieties spoken in Southern Italy, the Perifrasi Progressiva ‘*stare + Gerundio*’ sometimes occurs in contexts of future time reference:

(81) **State venendo** anche voi domani? [Lecce]

Having compiled a list of the relevant forms and having provided a description of the various items, we are now in a position to complete our graphical representation of the ‘meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ in Italian as shown in *Fig.7* (cf. appendix).

5.3 Comparison of English and Italian

Having described in their own terms both the English and the Italian ‘meta-categories of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ and having ensured that our language-specific observations remain comparable throughout, we may now proceed to contrast the ways in which the two selected languages encode the concept of futurity in their respective grammars. In doing so, we will concentrate primarily on the individual markers of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT, first by examining the predicted prototypical meanings they have been shown to share, later by focusing on the additional (peripheral) uses that they may assume. The simultaneous consideration of alternative language-specific means that take part in the expression of future time reference will allow us not only to explore differences and similarities with respect to the morphological and semantic properties of these language-particular devices, but also to determine the actual functional load carried by the English and Italian markers of FUT.

Scanning the two descriptive charts obtained as the results of our language-specific analyses (*Fig.5, Fig.7*) in the preceding chapters, it immediately becomes obvious that English and Italian each possess exactly one morphological form, namely ‘*will + Inf.*’ and the Futuro Semplice, respectively, which covers all of the core meanings contained in the cross-linguistic category-type FUT. While the relevant English item takes the form of a de-volitive analytic marker, its Italian counterpart constitutes a de-obligative synthetic construction. The different sources, however, generally seem to have an only marginal influence on the synchronic semantics of the relevant items, since, on the one hand, both forms may be used to make neutral predictions about the future and, on the other hand, both may assume a variety of more or less subtle modal values, thereby encoding intention- and volition-based future time reference as well as obligation-based meaning in the issuing of commands. Interestingly enough, however, there are a number of contexts in which English ‘*will + Inf.*’ continues to be significantly closer to its lexical source. As was shown earlier, conditional clauses and *yes/no*-interrogatives are cases in point. The residual volitive components may furthermore be quoted as a reason for the construction’s inability to convey obligative meaning outside commands. While the Italian Futuro Semplice, being a de-obligative device, rather unsurprisingly subsumes

this notion, English has to rely either on its more marginal de-obligative marker ‘*shall + Inf.*’ or on the semi-auxiliary ‘*have to*’.

If, due to the persistence of elements of its source meaning, ‘*will + Inf.*’ seems to be positioned at an early stage along the grammaticalization path, the non-future uses it encompasses constitute evidence to the contrary. In fact, just like the Italian Futuro Semplice, English ‘*will + Inf.*’ has developed a number of special uses, conveying non-deictic posteriority as well as gnomic and epistemic meaning. With respect to the latter, it has to be noted that the Italian Futuro Semplice in particular is frequently quoted for its highly developed epistemic use, noticeable, above all, in the spoken varieties (cf. Comrie (1989:5/6); Berretta (1992:147)).¹⁹

In addition to the uses listed above, ‘*will + Inf.*’ and the Futuro Semplice also encompass in their semantics a special sense of futurity that may be termed planning. However, while such contexts of heightened certainty constitute at best marginal instances of the English marker of FUT, the Futuro Semplice is clearly less restricted, appearing naturally in all sorts of statements about personal and officially determined plans. It is in these contexts of subjective or objective certainty that the English language relies on a rather large variety of different morphological means, all of which are able to convey a distinct sense of predetermination. Thus, the de-andative device ‘*be going to*’ (PROSP) is either employed in order to express a subject’s conscious decision and determination about what s/he proposes to do in the future, or to designate a future event whose actualization appears to be ensured due to present evidence. The Present Progressive (PROG) represents future situations as resulting from existing personal plans. Finally, the semi-auxiliary ‘*be to*’ and the Simple Present (DEFAULT) express future events that are predetermined by some authority or by circumstances that are outside the speaker’s control.

In contrast to English, Italian neither possesses any de-andative marker of future time reference, nor does it employ the Perifrasi Progressiva (PROG) in reference to future situations in its standard variety. The Presente (DEFAULT), however, frequently occurs in future-referring contexts, widely replacing the Futuro Semplice, particularly in

¹⁹ Berretta (1994:22-24) observes that Italian native speakers, contrary to the standard sequence established in acquisition literature, first produce epistemic and only later deictic instances of the Futuro Semplice. The author interprets these premature uses as reflections of colloquial adult language use, which is characterized by its high percentage of instances of the Futuro Semplice in epistemic contexts.

the colloquial varieties. The explicit marking of future time reference in Italian is, consequently, very rarely obligatory and seems to be determined by stylistic and pragmatic rather than semantic factors, requiring the use of the Futuro Semplice only in certain formal texts as well as in contexts in which temporal reference is not otherwise indicated as future-directed. English is clearly different in this respect for it allows for a future-referring use of the Simple Present only in a rather limited set of well-defined circumstances. In main clauses, the Simple Present is semantically restricted to the expression of future situations that are scheduled and sufficiently indicated as belonging to future time. In temporal and conditional subordinate clauses, by contrast, due to a syntactic constraint that largely blocks the overt marker of FUT in its future-referring sense, the Simple Present is typically found even if the notion of scheduling is absent. It has to be noted that this specific semantic constraint does not apply to Italian, where the Futuro Semplice and the Presente occur in free variation in most of the subordinate clauses of the mentioned type, bar dependent clauses introduced by temporal subordinating conjunctions that trigger the subjunctive mood.²⁰

English and Italian thus differ strikingly with respect to the obligatoriness of overt future marking. In fact, only the former regularly requires that future time reference be given formal grammatical expression in the verb complex by means of one of a number of coexisting morphological devices. Among these, ‘*be going to*’ (PROSP) stands out for having reached a considerably high degree of grammaticalization. Originally restricted to contexts of intentional meaning and/or present relevance, this construction has broadened its meaning to include instances of neutral future time reference, thereby moving into the territory originally covered exclusively by ‘*will + Inf.*’. In fact, “there are currently numerous situations in which the two are virtually interchangeable, according to speakers” (Fleischman, 1983:192).²¹

While Italian, as mentioned earlier, does not have any similar competing analytic marker of future time reference at its disposal, what it shares with English is the

²⁰ Due to the fact that both English and Italian basically allow for the replacement of their overt markers of future time reference by their respective markers of the cross-linguistic category-type DEFAULT, they are to be considered as ‘prospective’ systems (Ultan, 1978:88). However, since the degree to which such a substitution is accepted differs radically, they must clearly be understood as approaching opposite extremes on an appositely designed continuum of European languages (Comrie, 1985:49).

²¹ For similar observations, cf. Binnick (1971:41), Declerck (1991:207) and Bybee et al. (1994:296).

existence of a number of periphrases (<PROSP) specialized in the expression of imminent future situations.

In summary, our comparison of the ‘meta-categories of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’ has clearly shown that both English and Italian possess a variety of different devices for encoding future time reference, amongst which the respective morphological markers of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT. The relevant Italian marker is synthetic in form and, not unsurprisingly, presents a particularly ample gamma of future and non-future uses, while being replaceable by the DEFAULT marker in nearly all contexts. The relevant English form, by contrast, is an analytic construction. Not only does it turn out to be more restricted semantically and syntactically than its Italian counterpart, but it also appears to be just one of a larger number of morphological devices, all of which cover different but also partially overlapping semantic spaces. Moreover, there seems to be a competing analytic de-andative construction, not present in Italian, which constitutes a valid candidate for becoming yet another instance of the cross-linguistic category-type FUT.

6 Conclusions

Our typologically guided examination of the global apparatuses of future time reference in English and Italian has allowed us to describe and compare the individual ways in which these two languages cope with the task of encoding future time in their respective grammars. While English and Italian have proven to differ in a number of aspects concerning the inventory of markers they supply and the precise ways in which they semantically charge these items, the fact that both languages can indeed be considered exemplars of general cross-linguistic phenomena has ensured comparability throughout our discussion.

Our essentially contrastive goal has thus been reached. Starting off by recognizing futurity as a complex cognitive category, we inventoried the cross-linguistic category-types for mapping this conceptual space onto grammar and determined which language-specific forms are to be regarded as the relevant English and Italian exponents. Furthermore, the closer analysis of the two languages under scrutiny allowed us to

extend the lists by adding various language-specific devices, thereby compiling the respective ‘meta-categories of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)’.

It is by recognizing the ‘synthesis of the particular and the universal in any verbal sign’ (Jakobson, 1963:276) that the descriptive chart termed ‘meta-category’ becomes a most powerful tool for contrastive and typological research. Being applicable as a typological template and extendable to fit any language-specific system, it enables us to describe and compare the solutions that the world’s languages employ in order to solve the fundamental task of conveying the experience of time.

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Appendix

Conceptual Space	(Prototypical) Meanings	Cross-linguistic Category-type(s)	Form Term	Morphological Form	Temporal Reference
FTY	prediction	FUT DEFAULT PRED PROSP	<i>will</i> - Future / / <i>be going to</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf. / / <i>be going to</i>	future time
	intention	FUT <FUT PROSP	<i>will</i> - Future <i>shall</i> - Future <i>be going to</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf. <i>shall</i> + Inf. <i>be going to</i>	
	planning	(FUT) DEFAULT PROG PROSP <FUT	(<i>will</i> - Future) Simple Present Present Progressive <i>be going to</i> - Future <i>shall</i> - Future	(<i>will</i> + Inf.) - / -s <i>be</i> + Gerund <i>be going to</i> <i>shall</i> + Inf.	
	scheduling	DEFAULT [EXP]	Simple Present semi-auxiliary	- / -s <i>be to</i>	
	expectation	DEFAULT PROG PROSP [EXP]	Simple Present Present Progressive <i>be going to</i> - Future semi-auxiliary	- / -s <i>be</i> + Gerund <i>be going to</i> <i>be to</i>	
	hope	FUT DEFAULT	<i>will</i> - Future Simple Present	<i>will</i> + Inf. - / -s	
	volition	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	
	obligation	<FUT [OBL]	<i>shall</i> - Future semi-auxiliary	<i>shall</i> + Inf. <i>have to</i>	
	command	(FUT) [IMP]	(<i>will</i> - Future) Imperative	(<i>will</i> + Inf.) - (bare verb stem)	
	imminence	PROG PROSP <PROSP <PROSP	Present Progressive <i>be going to</i> - Future Prosp. Periphrasis Prosp. Periphrasis	<i>be</i> + Gerund <i>be going to</i> <i>be about to</i> <i>be on the point of</i>	
	remoteness	FUT <FUT PROSP	<i>will</i> - Future <i>shall</i> - Future <i>be going to</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf. <i>shall</i> + Inf. <i>be going to</i>	
	matter of course	FUT + PROG	Future Progressive	<i>will be</i> + Gerund	
HYPTY	realis condition	DEFAULT PROSP [EXP]	Simple Present <i>be going to</i> - Future semi-auxiliary	- / -s <i>be going to</i> <i>be to</i>	non-future time
	consequence	FUT [OBL]	<i>will</i> - Future modal verbs	<i>will</i> + Inf. <i>must, should, ...</i>	
GNOMY	eternal truths	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	
EPSMY	conjectures	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	
FITVY	posteriority	FUT	<i>will</i> - Future	<i>will</i> + Inf.	

[FTY (futura); HYPTY (hypotheticity); GNOMY (gnomicity); EPSMY (epistemicity); FITVY (fictivity)]
[<(close, but not good enough instance of category-type); (EXP (expected); OBL (obligation); IMP (imperative))]

Fig.5: The 'Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)' in English

Conceptual Space	(Prototypical) Meanings	Cross-linguistic Category-type(s)	Form Term	Morphological Form	Temporal Reference
FTY	prediction	—FUT DEFAULT PRED PROSP	Futuro Semplice Presente / /	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm / /	} future time
	intention	—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm	
	planning	FUT DEFAULT (PROG) PROSP	Futuro Semplice Presente (Perifrasi Prog.) /	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm (<i>stare</i> + Gerundio) /	
	scheduling	—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm	
	expectation	—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm	
	hope	—FUT [COMPL]	Futuro Semplice Congiuntivo Pres.	Simple Future paradigm Pres. Subjunctive paradigm	
	volition	—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm	
	obligation	—FUT [OBL]	Futuro Semplice verbo servile	Simple Future paradigm <i>dovere</i> + Inf.	
	command	—FUT [IMP]	Futuro Semplice Imperativo	Simple Future paradigm Imperative forms	
	imminence	—DEFAULT <PROSP <PROSP <PROSP <PROSP	Presente Perifrasi imminenz. Perifrasi imminenz. Perifrasi imminenz. Perifrasi imminenz.	Present paradigm <i>stare per</i> + Inf. <i>essere sul punto di</i> + Inf. <i>essere in procinto di</i> + Inf. <i>accingersi a</i> + Inf.	
	remoteness	—FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	
	HYPTY	realis condition	—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	
consequence		—FUT DEFAULT	Futuro Semplice Presente	Simple Future paradigm Present paradigm	
GNOMY	— eternal truths	—FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	
ESPMY	— conjectures	—FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	
FITVY	— posteriority	—FUT	Futuro Semplice	Simple Future paradigm	

[FTY (futuraity); HYPTY (hypotheticity); GNOMY (gnomicity); EPSMY (epistemicity); FITVY (fictivity)]
 [<(close, but not good enough instance of category-type; COMPL (complement); OBL (obligation); IMP (imperative)]
 [Perifrasi Prog. (Perifrasi Progressiva); Pres. (Present/e); Perifrasi imminenz. (Perifrasi imminenziale)]

Fig.7: The 'Meta-category of FUT(URE TIME REFERENCE)' in Italian