

Future reference without future tense

A *futurate* is a sentence with unexpected future reference, and in which unplannable eventualities are generally unacceptable (Lakoff, 1971; Prince, 1971; Vetter, 1973; Smith, 1991). Examples of futurates are given in (1). In English they can be either in the progressive form or the non-progressive form. To begin with, however, let us consider the meaning of progressive futurates.

Progressive futurates seem to assert that there is a plan for the eventuality to happen. But if that is all, (2a) should acceptably assert that there is no plan for it to rain tomorrow (since raining is not plannable), and (2b,c) should be equivalent. Speaker confidence seems to be one difference between (2b) and (2c) (Leech, 1971). But as Vetter (1973) shows, if a futurate presupposes confidence about whether the eventuality is planned, the assertion of (2d) denies one of its presuppositions.

While some existing analyses (e.g. Dowty, 1979; Cipria and Roberts, 2001) account for (2a,d), I know of none that account for the contrast in (2b,c).

There is a connection between belief that there is a plan and confidence that the plan will be carried out. For a valid plan to exist, the entity making the plan must have the authority to ensure its realization. In progressive futurates, the speaker presupposes that a contextually-supplied entity *d* has power such that if *d* is committed to (an eventuality described by) *p*'s happening, it will. Using a branching future modality (Thomason, 1970) and with *d*'s commitments as an ordering source (Kratzer, 1991), we have the denotation in (4).

This denotation ensures that (2a) is unacceptable, since *p* must be the kind of proposition that *d* could direct. (2b,c) and (2d) are no longer problematic, because the speaker must believe that if *d* is committed to *p*, it will happen.

As noted above, both progressives and non-progressives have futurate readings. The progressive operator has been implicated in futurate meaning since at least Dowty (1979); I suggest that generic aspect is responsible for futurate readings in non-progressives (following Wekker (1976)).

If aspect is indeed responsible for futurate readings, we expect that the denotations might be able to be minimally adapted to account for non-futurate progressives and generics. Promisingly, it seems that some non-futurate progressives and generics, such as those in (5) (cf., e.g., Landman (1992); Carlson (1989)), could be argued to have animate directors. The examples in (6) of course cannot, and have instead an inertial ordering (Dowty, 1979). (Presumably what links animate directors with inertial ordering sources is something like “lawfulness,” whether the law is manmade or natural.) Further supporting the link between futurates and non-futurates is the fact that there do exist futurates with inertial ordering sources, as in (7a) (Leech, 1971). I argue that (7b) is ruled out because there is existential rather than universal quantification over the time that the relevant laws hold. As the laws in question are natural (laws of physics), this existential quantification should be odd.

- (1) a. The Red Sox are playing the Yankees tomorrow.
b. The Red Sox play the Yankees tomorrow.
- (2) a. # It's not raining tomorrow.
b. # The Red Sox are playing tomorrow, but they won't.
c. The Red Sox are planned to play tomorrow, but they won't.
d. I'm not sure whether the Red Sox play tomorrow.

- (3) d *directs* p in w at t iff:
 $\forall w'$ metaphysically accessible from w at t and maximally consistent with d's commitments in w at t: [$\forall w''$ metaphysically accessible from w at t: [$\exists t' > t$: [p(w')(t')] \Leftrightarrow $\exists t'' > t$: [p(w'')(t'')]]]
- (4) a. Progressive futurate presupposition: d *directs* p in w at t
 b. Progressive futurate assertion: $\forall w'$ maximally consistent with d's commitments in w at t: [$\exists t' > t$: [p(w')(t')]]
- (5) a. Mary was crossing the street.
 b. The Speaker of the House succeeds the Vice President.
- (6) a. Mary was walking to her death.
 b. Bears hibernate.
- (7) a. The sun rises tomorrow at 5:13.
 b. ? The sun is rising tomorrow at 5:13

References

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