

# Adverbial Clauses of Time in the Future

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English teachers sometimes face explaining difficult grammar points to students. "Adverbial clauses of time in the future" are one example. In this paper, adverbial clauses of time to indicate the future will be explained as well as why the simple present tense is used rather than 'will' in a time clause although the meaning of the clause is future.

**Key words :** [adverbial clauses] [present tense] [past tense] [future time]  
[Bull framework]

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(Received September 17, 2002)

Students learn English verb tenses one by one, so when they learn how to use adverbial clauses of time in the future, they are puzzled. When I taught English at the senior high school in Nagasaki, I had no explanation when my students asked about this structure, so I just gave them the rule and had them practice. However, my uncertainty about the explanation remained. I will explain the answer using the Bull framework and Tregidgo's modification, and illustrate my explanation with examples from a newspaper and movies.

English uses several devices to signal future time, such as using *will/shall*, periphrastic modals, or adverbs of time (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1983: 61). To teach English verb tenses to students, we use twelve traditional English "tenses", because the curriculum is fixed by the government, and traditional methods are preferred. As a result, they learn the sentence level uses of these twelve tenses as Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman indicate, and when they write or speak some tenses are used awkwardly (1983: 67).

To solve these problems, Bull shows us how to explain the tense-aspect system at the discourse level of his framework. To simplify and modify Bull's approach, Tregidgo explains that "in English we have an obligatory primary choice between past and non-past, and an optional secondary choice before and after" (1979: 191). In other words, Bull outlines four axes of orientation or points of view: present, past, future, and hypothetical. The present and past time axes are most frequently used in English, and to express the time before each axis, perfect tenses are used; therefore, when we consider the interaction among tenses, we need to

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think of whether the discourse is written from the point of view of past, present, or future.

Although this framework is very useful within the axes of non-past or past, the future time axis is not clear. Bull places *will* in the after-present position (Tregidgo 1974: 98). Tregidgo states "Bull's theoretical distinction between after-present and future, as far as English is concerned, is an idle one with no practical importance" (1974: 101). In other words, Tregidgo seems to think that after-present and future mean basically the same thing. Therefore, to examine the expression of the future in time clauses, it might be useful to find a different point of view.

In *The Grammar Book*, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman take a historical approach. Their example is "John will travel to Europe this summer...After he *returns* to the States, he *will* begin graduate work in Management" (1983: 68). Then they explain the reason why the present tense is used on the future time axis as follows: First, Old English had two tenses, present and past, and present tense was used in order to express future time. Second, older forms and orders are retained longer in subordinate clauses than independent clauses (ibid). If the present tense was used in order to express future time, it is possible that it can be used in adverbial clauses of future time.

Tregidgo corroborates this point by using "the notion of tense-subordination," explaining that "it means that the view point of the tense-form (the subordinate tense) is based on the viewpoint of another (governing tense)" (1974: 192). In other words, the main clause tense affects the subordinate one. For example, "When you put your coat on, you will feel warmer." He rewrites this complex sentence into compound sentences, such as "You will put your coat on and you will feel warmer." The first sentence "you will put your coat on" is closely related to the second one "you will feel warmer." He concludes, "If we subordinate the first clause to the second, we also subordinate the first tense to second" (Tregidgo 1974: 195). His explanation is clear and I want to show how this structure works in some sentences from the newspaper and movies. In the *Daily Local News* on June 9, 2002, I found this statement in an article:

When the school bell *rings* for afternoon dismissal today at Bishop Shanahan High School, students *will* exit the historic Catholic high school for the final time.

Beginning this fall, an estimated 950 Shanahan students will attend a newly constructed 1,200 student capacity high school in Downingtown.

The particular structure which I am discussing occurs in the first line. The present tense of *rings* here does not indicate present time, but the same time, or very close to the time of students' leaving the high school. The use of "will ring" is not possible here, because the clause describing the action of the bells has been subordinated to the clause describing the action of the students by the use of the word *when*.



After I examined subordination in the *wh*-clause, I wanted to try to find a similar example in an *if*-clause. I looked for the structure in the newspapers, but I could not find one because the articles in them all reported what had happened in the past. This structure seems to be frequently used in our daily conversations; therefore, I searched for it in movies and found it in *The Princess Bride*:

Humperdinck: Someone has beaten a giant: There will be great suffering in Guilder if she dies.

This sentence can also be explained through the notion of tense-subordination. If we split the sentence into two, we get: She will die and there will be great suffering in Guilder. This shows two closely-related events, and the first sentence "She will die" leads directly to the second one "there will be great suffering in Guilder." Therefore, the present tense of *dies* in this sentence; *if she dies*; does not indicate present time. It indicates the *same* time as that of being great suffering, or more exactly, a time directly preceding and leading up to it. The use of "will die" as a non-modal future (Tregidgo uses modal *will* to mean "be willing to") (1974: 195) is not possible here because the second clause has been subordinated to the first by the use of the word *if*.

Although I explained that the simple present, not the simple future, is used in *if she dies*, I also found sentences including *will* in the *if*-clause in the same movie:

Buttercup: If *you'll* release me...whatever you ask for ransom...*you'll* get it.

I also found this structure in another movie, *Ghost*:

Carl: ...Look. If *it'll* make you feel any better, *I'll* go check this out. OK?

These sentences seem to break the rule that we are talking about, but they are still grammatically correct.

In the first example, *will* is used in "If *you'll* release me, ..." This *will* can be interpreted as *willingness* because *will* is not used in the time clause to express the future, so we can possibly suggest it might be another use of *will* meaning *willingness*. In the second example, Carl says, "if *it'll* make you feel any better, ..." The use of *will* in this *if*-clause is sort of an after-future, looking forward not from the moment of speech but from the future time of the main clause (Tregidgo 1974: 196). The use of *will* in the main clause of this sentence "*I'll* go check this out" can be also interpreted as *willingness*. Tregidgo gives us two examples:

- (a) If it'll be ready tomorrow, I'll pay it straightaway.



- (b) If it'll be ready tomorrow, I'll be able to wear it tomorrow night (1974: 196).

In sentence (a), "I'll pay for it." means "I am willing to pay for it." This is British English because of "straightaway." American people use "right away" instead. In sentence (b), "I'll be able to wear it..." seems strange according to one of my American friends. She says it is probably British English because this structure *If+will, S+will+V* is not even listed in the most important frequency data chart of conditional structures (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman 1983: 345). Therefore, we can assume these if-clause sentences, including *will*, are not a case of tense-subordination but independent clauses after-present looking forward from the moment of speech and referring to a time either before or after the time of the main verb (Tregidgo 1974: 196).

As we have seen, when *will* is used in expressing the future in subordinate clauses, such as if-clauses, the structure rule of using the simple present tense in a time clause works. Although I understand the logic of this structure, it would be difficult for me to explain the details of this rule to college students. It might increase their confusion. Therefore, I think that it would be better to give students many examples of this structure and try to infer the rule from them. After that, it would be helpful to have students practice how to use them in their daily conversation when they talk with native speakers in English. It is also useful for them to practice in writing because there are some questions about this structure on exams, such as entrance examinations, Step Tests, TOEIC, and TOEFL. In this case, adverbial clauses and nominal clauses of time in the future can be practiced at the same time, so that students see how the two structures are distinguished from one another.

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## 要 旨

英語の教師として教える時説明しにくい文法項目がある。「時や条件をあらわす副詞節の中では未来形は使えない」という項目はその1つである。このレポートではその「時や条件を表す副詞節」の中では、意味としては未来のことを表現しているのに、なぜ *will* ではなく現在形が使われるのか説明を試みている。