

A temporal structure-based analysis of the *be to*-construction

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Keywords: *be to*, future, modality, temporal structure

The tense theory adopted in my studies (Wada 1996, 2000, 2001, 2009, 2011, 2013) has been used to account for English future-referring expressions such as *will*, *be going to*, the present progressive, the simple present, the *will be -ing* form, and *be about to*. Therefore, it has the potential to be extended to the analysis of future-referring sentences with *be to* (BT-sentences), as in *The new play is to be staged at the Century Theatre next week* (Leech 2004: 70), another issue to be discussed. This presentation aims to systematically explain the characteristics and uses of BT-sentences in present-day English, especially those in main clauses, using my tense theory.

BT-sentences, often considered to express a variety of modal and temporal meanings (e.g. arrangements, plans, orders, destiny, ‘future-tense’), have been described in most English grammar books (e.g. Quirk et al. 1985, Thomson & Martinet 1986, Huddleston & Pullum 2002, Swan 2005) and monographs concerning tense and modality (e.g. Palmer 1990, Leech 2004, Nesselhauf 2006, Collins 2009). However, almost all of the previous studies have not analyzed BT-sentences in detail, let alone in a general theory of tense.

Only Declerck (2010), using corpus data, has offered a detailed synchronic analysis of the semantics and uses of BT-sentences in his own theory. He argues (a) that the BT-sentence consists of the M(odal)-state (the necessity of some kind) expressed by *be to* and the residue-situation expressed by the sentence minus *be to*; (b) that *be to* is primarily a modal expressing the future actualization of the residue-situation; (c) that *be to* expresses eight origins of (i.e. modal meanings associated with) the necessity; and (d) that the ‘future-tense’ use is derived by the bleaching of the M-state and the foregrounding of the residue-situation.

However, Declerck’s analysis has three drawbacks. First, he does not specify why the modal uses of *be to* are basic and the ‘future-tense’ use derivative. Second, he does not state how BT-sentences receive those modal meanings. Third, his analysis does not reflect the fact that *be* is separate from *to* at a lexical and/or syntactic level (Seppänen 1979, Sugayama 1998).

My analysis can accommodate Declerck’s drawbacks, but inherit the spirit of his analysis, and give a more comprehensive and systematic analysis. In particular, my points are (a) the BT-sentence is a ‘construction’ (a unit consisting of the syntactic and semantic components) in which *be* is finite, accompanied by ‘assertion,’ and syntactically separate from *to*, but *be to* constitutes a ‘semantic’ unit; (b) the construction is divided into three sub-constructions according to their temporal structures; (c) the factors contributing to the temporal structures are the two types of event times (i.e. the ‘pure’ and the ‘orientational’ types) represented by *be* and the event time associated with the infinitive, the posterior relationship indicated by *to*, and the position of temporal focus; and (d) the uses of BT-sentences (including the above-mentioned modal and ‘future-tense’ meanings/uses) are pragmatic interpretations deriving from the interaction between the temporal-structure and constructional information, on the one hand, and the semantic content of the elements constituting the BT-sentence involved and the contextual information, on the other.

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