

A Contrastive View of *Will* and *Be Going to* and Their Czech Translation Equivalents
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The difference between *will* and *be going to* is often attributed to contextual factors: unlike *will*, *be going to* is said to be a present context indicator (see Haegeman 1989). In Czech, where the category of Czech verbal aspect takes priority over the category of verbal tense, one of the signals of future time is also incompatible with the notion of the present while the other one may include it. More specifically, in the case of perfective verbs (e.g. *udělám* do:PFV.PRS.1SG “I will do”), a formally present-tense form is a signal of future time which excludes the present moment (see e.g. *Mluvnice češtiny 2*, 164–5); in contrast, the Czech imperfective verb distinguishes between the present (e.g. *dělám* do:IMPF.PRS.1SG “I do/I am doing”) and the analytical future tense (*budu dělat* be:AUX.FUT.1SG do:IMPF.INF “I will do”), and its present-tense form may include both the present and the future, i.e., under certain circumstances it can refer to a future event (ibid.).

Following Johansson (2007, 28), who argues that “[o]ne of the most fascinating aspects of multilingual corpora is that they can make meanings visible through translation”, one can ask whether Czech translation equivalents indeed render *be going to* as a present context indicator, in other words whether there are more present-tense imperfective translation equivalents of *be going to* than *will*. This issue also entails another one, namely the way in which volition is rendered in the translations of *be going to* and *will*. Both forms can be signals of volition and futurity, and there has been an ongoing discussion whether there is a semantic difference between futurity and volition or whether these are just (pragmatic) overtones (see e.g. Haegeman 1989, Nicolle 1997 and Biber et al. 1999). In this respect, the methodology adopted here reflects Haegeman (1989, 309), who argues: “One can arrive at a systematic description of the use of sentences with *will* or *be going to* only in a framework that permits individual sentences to be related to sets of background propositions, that is to say to a context”. That is also what the translators base their choices on when translating *will* and *be going to*, and if *be going to* (unlike *will*) is rendered into Czech as a present context indicator, it can be hypothesised that there will be more non-futurate, i.e. volitional equivalents of *be going to* than of *will*.

The corpus used in this study is InterCorp, a multilingual parallel corpus comprising 31 languages with Czech as the pivot language. A subcorpus of English original fiction texts published after 1950 was created for the purpose of this study (41 texts by British, American and Canadian authors; the subcorpus contains 5,100,821 positions). Using what Biber et al. (1999) call “structural correlates”, I focused on the pragmatic and contextual factors which correlate with volition and futurity. Specifically, I focused on the translation equivalents of *will* and *be going to* in assertive and non-assertive contexts and on the speaker-addressee relationship: the translation equivalents of *will* and *be going to* were first divided into positive declarative, negative declarative and interrogative sentences and then subdivided according to the grammatical subject.

The InterCorp data show (Table 1) that *be going to* is more frequently translated by the present tense than *will* in the assertive context, i.e. in positive declarative sentences with all subjects. In non-assertive contexts, this applies to questions with first person subjects and negative declarative sentences with second person subjects. These are exactly the contexts in which *be going to* – but not *will* – is rendered into Czech as an expression of volition. In all the other non-assertive contexts, however, *be going to* is generally rare, and negative declarative sentences even show a relatively high percentage of imperfective present-tense translation equivalents of *will*. Thus while the data seem to confirm that *be going to* is a present context indicator, the status of *will* is less clear and deserves more attention.

Table 1. An overview of Czech present-tense imperfective translation equivalents of *will* and *be going to* in assertive (positive declarative sentences) and non-assertive (negative and interrogative sentences) contexts with different subjects: data from the InterCorp subcorpus (5,100,821 positions)

		<i>WILL</i>				<i>BE GOING TO</i>			
		Czech present-tense imperfective translation equivalents of <i>will</i>			Translation equivalents of <i>will</i> in total	Czech present-tense imperfective translation equivalents of <i>be going to</i>			Translation equivalents of <i>be going to</i> in total
		Σ	i.p.m.	%		Σ	i.p.m.	%	
POSITIVE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES									
1st person subject	<i>I</i>	22	4.3*	5.7	384* (*sample 500)	54	10.6	20.4	265
	<i>we</i>	6	1.2	7.4	81	18	3.5	19.8	91
2nd person subject		22	4.3*	6.6	336* (*sample 500)	29	5.7	22.7	128
3rd person subject	anim.	19	3.7	10.3	185	20	3.9	14.5	138
	inanim.	11	2.2	9.2	120	14	2.7	15.1	93
INTERROGATIVE SENTENCES (POSITIVE)									
1st person subject	<i>I</i>	1	0.2	-	23	3	0.6	-	20
	<i>we</i>	0	0	-	9	1	0.2	-	24
2nd person subject		16	3.1	6.7	238	37	7.3	39.4	94
3rd person subject	anim.	2	0.4	2.4	85	6	1.2	-	17
	inanim.	1	0.2	-	36	0	0	-	2
NEGATIVE DECLARATIVE SENTENCES									
1st person subject	<i>I</i>	33	6.5	13.9	238	26	5.1	29.2	89
	<i>we</i>	7	1.4	10.4	67	1	0.2	-	8
2nd person subject		21	4.1	13.5	155	5	1	-	33
3rd person subject	anim.	58	11.4	20.1	289	0	0	-	42
	inanim.	24	4.7	13	185	3	0.6	-	23

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Corpus

Czech National Corpus – InterCorp. Institute of the Czech National Corpus. Available online at <http://www.korpus.cz>.