

Future reference: Exploring the hypothesis space  
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When we talk about the future, do we talk about many possible future branches or one single future branch? Linguists have been divided on this question. Many-branch theories do better than single-branch theories on modal-like properties of future meanings as in the following:

- (1)
  - a. Intentions: *I will marry you.*
  - b. Truth value judgments: *It will rain on February 15th.*
  - c. Non-determinism: the possibility that things could (have) turn(ed) out differently, closely related to . . .
  - d. Contingency on the past/present: the intuition that the future depends on the present
  - e. Involvement of past/present tense: *Yesterday I thought the Red Sox would win tomorrow, but today I think the Yankees will win tomorrow.*
  - f. Aspect: *If you want, we'll /#we're going to change your oil in Madera.*

However, future meanings also have properties more conducive to single-branch theories:

- (2)
  - a. Ability to occur with modal adverbials: *There will/\*must possibly be a sea battle tomorrow, cf. There was possibly a sea battle yesterday.*
  - b. Truth value judgments: *I'm going to leave for Paris on Wednesday.*
  - c. Future Law of the Excluded Middle/bivalence: *Either there will be a sea battle tomorrow or there won't be a sea battle tomorrow.*

These latter points are the major problematic issues to be addressed by many-branch theories. However, the single-branch option has not been fully explored. In this talk I show how a single-branch theory that incorporates many-branch insights could account for modal-like properties, and present additional future-referring data (bare eventives, futurates, near-future presents) that many-branch theories have difficulty with; the notion of a single branch as a causal chain proves useful here. I note, however, that cross-linguistic and intra-linguistic variation in the data may still well motivate variation in explanations.