A Linguistic View on the Use of *Will* and *Shall* as Auxiliaries or Inflections

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Abstract: In the English grammar lessons, *will* and *shall* are taught in schools and universities as modal verbs. Almost all famous grammarians confirm that *will* and *shall* are modal verbs. Modal verbs are considered as auxiliaries apart from the main or primary auxiliaries *be, have, and do*. Considering the definitions and characteristics of auxiliaries and inflections, a deep understanding of *will* and *shall* is required. This paper examines the definitions and characteristics of both auxiliaries and inflections and the uses of *will* and *shall* in order to know whether *will* and *shall* are auxiliaries or free inflections of the Future Tense. However it is worth mentioning that time is divided into *past, present, and future.* In modern English, almost grammarians say that there are two tenses in English namely *present tense* and *past tense*. According to them, the future tense does not exist. They believe so simply because there is no inflection for future tense; the futurity is expressed through modal verbs (will and shall). Generally speaking, modal auxiliaries help lexical verbs to express a variety of meanings, different attitudes, such as mood, aspect, etc. whereas inflections help verbs to express tenses. For instance, -*ed* is a bound inflection that helps regular verbs express the *simple past tense*. The –*s* is also a bound inflection that expresses the third person singular in the *Simple Present Tense* whereas –*Ø is* an invisible inflection which expresses the *first persons (singular and plural), second persons (singular and plural), and the third person plural of the Simple Present Tense)*. Is there any inflection for the *Future Tense?* This paper is an attempt to answer this question.

Keywords: Will, Shall, Auxiliaries, Modal Auxiliary Verbs, Inflections, Lexical or Ordinary Verbs

1. Introduction

In almost all grammar books, one reads that *will* and *shall* are modal auxiliary verbs. Furthermore, most grammarians assert that there are two tenses in the English language. This fact should attract the attention of any attentive linguist so as to examine the veracity of such an affirmation. The aim of this article is to examine the veracity of the fact that *will* and *shall* are modal verbs and point out what they are exactly.

Therefore, this paper presents firstly an overview of the main or primary auxiliary verbs, the modal auxiliary verbs, and inflections. Secondly, it discusses and demonstrates to which extent there are three tenses in English instead of two claimed by most grammarians, and it proves that the Future Tense exists in the English Language. Like all tenses, the Future Tense has and it must have its inflection.

2. Auxiliary

Crystal [2] defines the term auxiliary as ''a term used in the grammatical classification of verbs to refer to the set of verbs, subordinate to the main lexical verb, which help to make distinctions in mood, aspect, voice, etc''. Stump [6] defines the terms aspect, voice, and mood as follows: ''mood is a category of morphosyntactic properties which, as inherent properties, distinguishes the ways in which a proposition may relate to actuality (in the speaker's mind). ''Aspect is a category of morphosyntactic properties distinguishing the various senses in which an event e can be situated at a particular time interval i''. ''Voice is a category of morphosyntactic properties distinguishing the various thematic relations that may exist between a verb and its subject''. There are auxiliaries known as main or primary auxiliary verbs and auxiliaries known as modal auxiliary

verbs. Let us examine these two categories of auxiliaries.

2.1. Main or Primary Auxiliaries

In the English language, there are three main auxiliaries viz *be, have,* and *do*. These auxiliaries play a grammatical function within sentences.

2.1.1. Be

As an auxiliary, *be* helps in the formation of the continuous aspect, the passive voice, or obligation when followed by *to*.

Formation of continuous tense

(1) Mary is cooking some rice.

In the sentence (1) the presence of is forces the addition of –ing form to the lexical verb. This combination of be+lexical verb with ing form results into a progressive aspect. However, it should be noted that the auxiliary be has different forms which are: am, is, are, was, were, being, and been.

Passive voice

(2) The banana was eaten by John.

In (2), the presence of was obliges the addition of –en to the lexical verb to form the passive voice.

Obligation

The auxiliary be expresses an obligation (which is a mood) when followed by to as in

(3) John is to go now.

2.1.2. Have

Have is an auxiliary verb which helps in making perfective sentences as an auxiliary verb, it has these forms: *have, has, had.*

Have is used to form the present perfect of lexical or ordinary verbs. It concerns only the first person (singular and plural), second person (singular and plural), and the third person plural.

(4) You have asked a good question.

In (4), *have* forces the verb *ask* to be inflected by having –ed at its end in order to form the Present Perfect Tense.

i   Has

Like have*, has* is used to form the Present Perfective aspect of the lexical verbs. It is concerned with the third person singular.

(5) She has cooked some rice.

ii   Had

Had is one of the forms of *have*. It is used to form the Past Perfective aspect of the lexical verbs.

(6) She had cooked some rice.

2.1.3. Do

Do is an auxiliary verb used to make an emphasis, question, negative and the Simple Past Tense of lexical verbs. Its forms are *do, does,* and *did.*

Do is used in the Present Tense to make an emphasis, questions, and denials in combination with *not*.

(7) I do ask the same question.

(8) Do you speak English?

(9) They do not speak French.

In (7), *do* is used to show the speaker's insistence. The lexical verb *ask* is unable (by itself) to indicate this emphasis if *do* is not used with it. This is what we call, the emphatic Do. Likely in (8) and (9) the verb *speak* cannot, by itself, express a question or a denial.

2.2. Modal Verbs

A modal auxiliary verb is used to modify the mood of a verb [12]. Many grammarians list the following list of modal verbs: *can, could, may, might, must, shall, should, ought to, will, etc.*

2.2.1. Can

Can is used to express possibility, impossibility, ability, permission, instruction and request, and offers and invitations.

1. *Possibility*: e.g. (10) You can learn English.
2. *Impossibility:* e.g. (11) She cannot go to Matadi on foot.
3. *Ability:* e.g. (12) Mary can drive this car.
4. *Permission:* e.g. (13) Can I ask a question?
5. *Instruction and request:* e.g. (14) Can you fill in this form?/ Can you help John to fill in this form?

2.2.2. May

May expresses permission and possibility.

1. *Permission:* e.g. (15) May I go out, Sir?
2. *Possibility:* e.g. (16) It may rain this afternoon.

2.2.3. Must

Must expresses obligation, necessity, probability, strong determination.

1. *Obligation:* e.g. (17) You must come on time.
2. *Necessity:* e.g. (18) You must buy a new mobile for your business.
3. *Strong determination:* e.g. (19) I must complete my studies this year.

2.2.4. Ought to

It expresses duty, necessity, moral obligation, etc.

1. *Duty:* e.g. (20) We ought to obey our parents.
2. *Necessity:* e.g. (21) They ought to learn English.
3. *Moral obligation:* e.g. (22) You ought to welcome your clients.

2.2.5. Shall

It expresses a command, threat, and determination.

1. *Command:* e.g. (23) You shall say the truth.
2. *Threat:* e.g. (24) He shall be punished.
3. *Determination:* e.g. (25) I shall meet him.

2.2.6. Will

It expresses determination, promise, threat or willingness, futurity.

1. *Determination:* e.g. (26) I will get a car by any means.
2. *Promise:* e.g. (27) I will pay you. / I will always love you, Honey.
3. *Threat:* e.g. (28) You will be civilized.
4. *Willingness:* e.g. (29) You will come with me. / If you will wait a moment, I'll bring you a glass of chilly

water.

5. *Futurity:* e.g. (30) She will come tomorrow.

The above uses of modal verbs show clearly that modals express possibility, impossibility, ability, permission, instruction, request, offers, invitation, obligation, necessity, probability, strong determination, duty, moral obligation, command, threat, promise, willingness, and futurity. It is clear to notice that modals do not express tenses as Eastwood [3] writes that "with modal verbs we can express ideas such as actions being possible or necessary". One of the uses of will is the futurity. What is futurity? Is it an aspect? Is it an attitude? The answers to these questions help understand what modals are exactly.

2.3. Characteristics of Modals

Considering the uses of modals, one can notice that modals:

1. are not main verbs; they are never used alone in a statement;
2. do not form tenses (except *will* and *shall* which are considered as modal verbs);
3. express (through verbs) attitudes and aspects;
4. are used with lexical verbs without *to;*
5. are not used with other modals or auxiliaries;
6. are not used with –s in the third person singular.
7. are never used with the do-construction to form the negative and question forms of ordinary verbs

3. Inflection

Erichsen [4] defines *inflection* as "*the change in the form of a word to indicate a change in its grammatical usage*". In addition to this definition, Erichsen says that "*there is also a second meaning for 'inflection'. It can refer to how words are stressed or given tone*".

Generally speaking, inflections are affixes which are added to nouns (to express the number and gender), adjectives (to express comparison and superlatives), verbs (tenses, aspects, gerund, and participle). In this article, the focus is on the verbal inflections i.e. inflections used with verbs. The following are inflections concerning verbs.

3.1. -s and -Ø

Apart from the modal verbs, all lexical verbs (in the Present Tense) take –s in the third person singular and –Ø (zero or empty inflection) for the rest persons. It is worth pointing out that –s is pronounced in three different ways depending on the type of sound preceding it. It is pronounced [s] when it appears after an unvoiced sound (/p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /θ/) as in (31) *He puts on his trousers.* / Our English class usually starts at 10a.m. It is pronounced [z] after vowels and most voiced sounds (/b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /ð/, /ŋ/ as in (32) *She reads a lot / David runs fast. The third pronunciation is* [iz] after /s/, /z/, /ʒ /, /ʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʧ/ such as in the example (32) My wife watches TV every evening./ He often uses his car.

3.2. -ed

-ed is an inflection used as a suffix to regular verbs to express the Past Tense. It is pronounced [d] after vowels and voiced sounds (/b/, /g/, /v/, /ð/, /l/, /z/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/) as in the following example, (33) My parents never lived in a town. / Brigitte agreed to buy a new car. It is pronounced [t] when preceded by a voiceless sound, like /p/, /k/, /f/, / θ/, /s/, /ʃ/, /ʧ/, as in (34) The tram stopped near our school./ Mummy worked on a farm. Finally it is pronounced [id] after the sounds /d/ and /t/ as in (35) I have decided to live like a believer / Benive started cooking late.

As far as irregular verbs are concerned, inflections occur in the change of the root of verbs. Thus, (36) To go – went – gone; To see – saw - seen

3.3. -n(t) and –ing

-n(t) expresses perfective aspect whereas *–ing* expresses progressive aspect or gerund.

Apart from inflections in the form of affixes, it is noticed that inflections occur also in rising and falling intonation as it is written in an unspecified source that "*inflections, in reading, are turns or slides of the voice, either upward or downward. There are two inflections – The rising inflection and the falling inflection*". This is to say that inflections should not be considered as bound morphemes only; they can also be free morphemes. Any affix or word that can change, specify or mark the tense of a verb should be considered as an inflection as Bickel and Nichols [1] say that "*cross-linguistic variation in the forms and categories of inflectional morphology is so great that 'inflection' cannot be defined by simply generalizing over attested inflectional systems or paradigms. Rather, we can define it as those categories of morphology that are sensitive to the grammatical environment in which they are expressed*". Let us turn now to the characteristics of inflections.

3.4. Characteristics of verbal inflections

Verbal inflections play grammatical roles within verbs in which they appear. They are characterized by

tense formation;

aspect formation;

no attitude expression.

4. Discussion

Primary auxiliaries, modal verbs and verbal inflections affect verbs as to express tense, aspect or voice. It goes without saying that our discussion focuses on tense. There are some divergent views about the number of tenses in English. On the one hand, some say that there are two tenses in English. This is the case of the Collins English Language Teaching, Lawless English and others. It is worth noting that the Collins English Language Teaching [13] claims that "*there are two tenses in English, the 'present' and 'past' tense; there are the only verb forms that do not require an auxiliary*". According to Lawless English [14] "*there are two tenses in English: present and past. Unlike many languages,*

English does not have a future tense. To talk about the future, English requires either the modal verb WILL or the present progressive" For Eastwood [3] *"tenses mean present time and past time, 'now' and 'then'"*. On the other hand, some people such as Wren, Martin, and Rao [9] consider the future as the third tense when they write *"thus there are three tenses – the Present, the Past, the Future"*. Likewise, Lutrin, Beryl and Marcelle Pincus [8] also distinguish three tenses to tell when the action takes place: Present – today; Past – yesterday; and Future – tomorrow.

For those who believe that there are two tenses, the fact is that the future tense is not reflected as the Present and Past tenses. They consider *WILL and SHALL* as modal auxiliary verbs. Lewis [15] describes the tense as involving *"a morphological change in the base form of the verb. A verb form which is made with an auxiliary is not, in this technical meaning, a 'tense'"*. This is to say that as the future is made of *will/shall + verb*; the presence of *will/shall* as an auxiliary removes the properties or characteristics of what the tense should be. This kind of thinking is due, may be, to the fact that the inflections that change the base form of the verb are mainly bound morphemes such as –s, and –ed as it is mentioned in [10] that *"an inflection expresses one or more grammatical categories with a prefix, suffix or infix, or another internal modification such as a vowel change"*. Another reason is in [11] when they write *"since the expression of the future time does not involve any inflection of the verb, we do not refer to as 'future tense'. Strictly speaking, there are only two tenses in English: Present and Past"*. One can notice that the reason why the future time is not considered as a Future Tense is the absence of inflection that can change or modify the base form of verbs in order to express future time. 'Will and Shall' do not change or modify the base form of the verb. Therefore, they are considered as modal verbs. One may ask this question: "What does tense mean?" Wren, Martin, and Rao [9] answer that the *"word tense comes from the latin tempus, time"*. Collins Cobuild English Grammar [16] adds that a tense is *"a verb form that indicates a particular point in time or period of time"*. The tense is a point in time. Time is naturally divided in three parts: ancient, now, and coming or next. The Ancient time is referred to as the PAST, now is referred to as the PRESENT, and the coming or next is referred to as the FUTURE. All these are particular points in time. Therefore, future time (as present time and past time are tenses) is really a tense. Crystal [2] defines the Future Tense as a *"tense form which refers to future time, as in French j'irai 'I'll go. English has no inflectional future tense, but has many ways of referring to future time, such as through the use of the modal verbs will/shall"*. Crystal seems to contradict himself when he acknowledges the Future Tense but denies the presence of inflection for future tense. Alexander [17] writes about the Future Tense that *"the simple future is formed with* will *and the base form of the verb"*. Alexander agrees that the Future Tense exists, and it is formed with *will*. In the same vein, Eastwood [3] supports the Alexander's view when he says *"we use will + base form for the future"*. Then, he adds that

"will often expresses the future as fact, something we cannot control. It expresses a prediction, a definite opinion about the future". Thomson and Martinet [7] write that *"there is no future tense in modern English, but for convenience we often use the term 'future simple' to describe the form will/shall + bare infinitive"*. Thomson and Martinet avoid saying that the Future Tense exists, instead they use the term *'future simple'*. Their avoidance is due to the fact that they believe that there is no inflection expressing the Future Tense in English. Naturally, Thomson and Martinet feel that the future time should also be represented by a tense, but they do not say it. By using the phrase *future simple,* they refer to the Future Tense because the *future simple* is not an aspect, mood, voice, number, etc. Now, it is clear to understand that the Future Tense exists. As all tenses, the Future tense has and must have its specific marker that stands as its inflection. To understand this, let us look at the French language to which Crystal refers to illustrate the Future Tense. French verbs are classified in three groups represented by the inflections -er (the first group), -ir (the second group), and –oir/-re (the third group). Each group has its inflections for each tense. As far as the future tense is concerned, almost all French verbs have the same inflections. Here below are inflections expressing the Future Tense in French.

-rai (the first person singular)
-ras (the second person singular)
-ra (the third person singular)
-rons (the first person plural)
-rez (the second person plural)
-ront (the third person plural)

All these inflections are the equivalent of *will/shall* in the English language. The difference is that the French inflections are bound morphemes whereas *will/shall* are free morphemes as Hana [18] supports it that a free morpheme *"can appear as a word by itself; often can combine with other morphemes"*. *Will* and *shall* are used with the base form of lexical verbs and they can move (as free morphemes) to the front position of the subject when the sentence is a question. They constitute free inflections of the Future Tense in English. They do not express aspect as it is the case of modals.

Furthermore, considering the characteristics of modal verbs and verbal inflections, it is obvious that modals are not involved in tense formation of verbs. *Will* and *shall* are involved in the formation of the Future Tense. Therefore, they should not be only considered as modal verbs, but also as inflections because they perform both roles. In making request or recommendation, they play the role of modals. When they inflect verbs to express the Future Tense, they are inflections.

5. Conclusion

This article has presented what primary auxiliaries, modal verbs, and inflections are so as to examine whether *will* and *shall* are auxiliaries or inflections. Considering definitions and characteristics of modal auxiliary verbs and inflections,

one can notice that *will* and *shall* which are considered as modals, should be well examined. No modal verb expresses the tense of verbs except *will* and *shall*. Although *will* and *shall* are used in making requests and recommendations, they are also the future markers. In the discussion, it has been proved that there are three tenses in English (Past, Present, and Future tenses) though some grammarians believe that there are only two tenses in English – Past and Present tenses. However, it should be noted that time is naturally divided in three different parts viz, ancient, now, and coming or next. The *ancient* time is referred to as the PAST; *now* is referred to as the PRESENT, and the *coming* or *next* is referred to as the FUTURE. All these are particular points in time. Each particular point in time is distinguished from other points by means of inflections and constitutes a particular tense. The present and past tenses have their inflections which are demonstrated above in the discussion. Likewise, future time (as present time and past time are tenses) is really a tense. In the same way the Past and Present tenses have inflections, the Future Tense has and must have its inflection which is the future marker.

The discussion revealed that *will* and *shall* are both modal auxiliary verbs and inflections. To put it clear, when *will* and *shall* express request, recommendation or some other things of that sort, on the one hand, they are modal auxiliary verbs. Whereas on the other hand, when they mark the Future Tense, they are free inflections.

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