

Cognitive and Functional Approaches to English Language Futurity in EFL Contexts

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Abstract

The expression of future time in English is one of the most complex areas of English grammar because it is realized through multiple grammatical constructions rather than a single morphological future tense. English employs a variety of forms, including *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, and future perfect constructions, each conveying distinct semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-related meanings. This diversity presents significant challenges for learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), who often struggle to distinguish among these forms and use them appropriately in authentic communication. This paper examines English futurity through the complementary perspectives of Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics and explores their implications for EFL teaching and learning. Drawing on contemporary linguistic literature, the paper reviews the conceptual foundations of future-time reference and explains how cognitive processes such as conceptualization, construal, mental representation, and conceptual metaphor shape the interpretation of future expressions. It also discusses how Functional Linguistics accounts for the communicative purposes served by different future constructions in discourse. Furthermore, the paper compares these two theoretical perspectives, highlighting their complementary contributions to understanding English futurity. It identifies major challenges encountered by EFL learners, including semantic ambiguity, contextual variation, first-language transfer, and the interaction between futurity and modality. Finally, the paper proposes pedagogical strategies integrating cognitive and functional principles and outlines future research directions. It concludes that combining Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics provides a comprehensive framework for improving grammar instruction and communicative competence in EFL contexts.

Keywords: English futurity; Cognitive Linguistics; Functional Linguistics; English as a Foreign Language; future-time reference.

المقاربتان المعرفية والوظيفية للتعبير عن المستقبل في اللغة الإنجليزية في سياقات تعليم الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

الملخص

يُعدُّ التعبير عن الزمن المستقبلي في اللغة الإنجليزية من أكثر المجالات تعقيداً في قواعد اللغة الإنجليزية، وذلك لأنه يتحقق من خلال مجموعة متعددة من التراكيب النحوية وليس من خلال صيغة صرفية مستقبلية واحدة. وتستخدم اللغة الإنجليزية مجموعة متنوعة من التراكيب للتعبير عن الأحداث المستقبلية، مثل الأفعال المساعدة، والتراكيب الدالة على النية والخطط المستقبلية، وصيغ المضارع المستخدمة للإشارة إلى المستقبل، وصيغ المستقبل التام، حيث ينقل كل تركيب منها معاني دلالية وتداولية وخطابية مختلفة. ويشكل هذا التنوع تحدياً كبيراً أمام متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، إذ يواجهون غالباً صعوبة في التمييز بين هذه التراكيب واختيار التركيب المناسب واستخدامه بفاعلية في مواقف التواصل الحقيقية. تتناول هذه الورقة ظاهرة التعبير عن المستقبل في اللغة الإنجليزية من خلال منظورين متكاملين هما اللسانيات المعرفية واللسانيات الوظيفية، كما تستكشف آثارهما في مجال تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية وتعلمها. واستناداً إلى الأدبيات اللسانية المعاصرة، تستعرض الورقة الأسس المفاهيمية للإحالة إلى الزمن المستقبلي، وتوضح كيفية تأثير العمليات المعرفية، مثل التصور المفاهيمي، وبناء المنظور، والتمثيل الذهني، والاستعارة المفاهيمية، في تفسير تراكيب المستقبل. كما تناقش دور اللسانيات الوظيفية في تفسير الوظائف التواصلية التي تؤديها التراكيب المختلفة للتعبير عن المستقبل في الخطاب. وتقارن الورقة بين هذين المنظورين النظريين، موضحةً إسهاماتهما المتكاملة في فهم ظاهرة المستقبل في اللغة الإنجليزية. كما تحدد أبرز التحديات التي تواجه متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية، بما في ذلك الغموض الدلالي، والتنوع السياقي، وتأثير اللغة الأولى، والتداخل بين التعبير عن المستقبل والدلالة على الاحتمال أو الالتزام أو درجة اليقين. وأخيراً، تقترح الورقة استراتيجيات تربوية تجمع بين المبادئ المعرفية والوظيفية، وتعرض توجهات بحثية مستقبلية تتعلق بتطوير تعليم القواعد وفهم استخدام تراكيب المستقبل. وتخلص الورقة إلى أن التكامل بين اللسانيات المعرفية واللسانيات الوظيفية يوفر إطاراً شاملاً لفهم التعبير عن المستقبل في اللغة الإنجليزية، ويسهم في تحسين تدريس القواعد وتعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية لدى متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغة أجنبية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التعبير عن المستقبل في اللغة الإنجليزية؛ اللسانيات المعرفية؛ اللسانيات الوظيفية؛ اللغة الإنجليزية بوصفها لغة أجنبية؛ الإحالة إلى الزمن المستقبلي.

1. Introduction

The expression of future time in English is one of the most intricate aspects of English grammar because it is realized through a variety of grammatical constructions rather than a single inflectional future tense. Unlike many languages that employ a dedicated future tense, English expresses futurity through multiple forms, including *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, future continuous, future perfect, and future perfect continuous constructions. Each of these forms conveys distinct semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-related meanings that reflect differences in prediction, intention, planning, obligation, probability, and speaker commitment. Consequently, selecting an appropriate future-time expression depends not only on grammatical accuracy but also on the communicative context and the speaker's intended meaning.

The complexity of English futurity presents considerable challenges for learners of English as EFL. Many learners tend to associate future time exclusively with the auxiliary *will*, overlooking the functional distinctions among alternative constructions. This oversimplification often leads to inappropriate form selection, limited communicative competence, and difficulties in interpreting subtle differences in meaning. Furthermore, interference from learners' first languages, many of which encode future time differently, may contribute to persistent grammatical and pragmatic errors. As a result, mastery of English

future-time reference requires more than memorizing grammatical rules; it demands an understanding of the conceptual and communicative principles underlying the use of different future expressions. Traditional approaches to teaching English grammar have frequently emphasized structural descriptions and prescriptive rules, presenting future forms as isolated grammatical patterns to be learned and practiced. Although such approaches provide learners with essential grammatical knowledge, they often fail to explain why speakers choose one future construction over another in authentic communication. Contemporary linguistic research has increasingly recognized that grammatical forms are closely connected to meaning construction, conceptualization, and communicative function. This shift has encouraged the adoption of theoretical frameworks that account for both the cognitive mechanisms through which speakers conceptualize future events and the functional purposes that grammatical choices serve in discourse.

Cognitive Linguistics offers a valuable perspective by viewing grammar as a reflection of human conceptualization rather than as an autonomous system of formal rules. From this viewpoint, future-time expressions represent different ways of construing forthcoming events based on factors such as intention, prediction, evidence, certainty, and temporal perspective. Future forms are therefore understood as meaningful constructions that encode speakers' mental representations of events rather than interchangeable grammatical alternatives. Concepts such as conceptualization, mental spaces, construal, and prototype effects provide important insights into how English speakers perceive and express future situations. Complementing this perspective, Functional Linguistics examines language primarily as a resource for communication. Within this framework, grammatical choices are interpreted according to the communicative purposes they fulfill in particular social and discourse contexts. English future constructions serve a wide range of interpersonal and textual functions, including making promises, expressing intentions, announcing decisions, predicting outcomes, scheduling events, giving instructions, and negotiating social relationships. The selection of a future form is therefore influenced not only by temporal reference but also by contextual variables such as register, discourse purpose, speaker–listener relationships, and the degree of certainty or obligation associated with an event.

Integrating cognitive and functional perspectives provides a more comprehensive understanding of English futurity than either approach alone. While Cognitive Linguistics explains how speakers conceptualize future events, Functional Linguistics accounts for how those conceptualizations are realized in authentic communicative contexts. Together, these complementary perspectives illuminate the relationship between grammatical form, conceptual meaning, and discourse function, offering a richer explanation of the diversity of future-time expressions in English. Such an integrated perspective is particularly valuable in EFL settings, where learners must develop not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to make appropriate linguistic choices in real-life communication.

The present paper explores English futurity through the complementary lenses of Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics and discusses their implications for English language teaching. It first reviews the linguistic nature of future-time reference in English and then examines how cognitive and functional theories explain the meanings and uses of different future constructions. The paper also identifies the major difficulties encountered by EFL learners in acquiring English future-time expressions and proposes pedagogical strategies that integrate conceptual understanding with communicative practice. By bridging theoretical linguistics and language pedagogy, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of English futurity and to provide practical insights for improving grammar instruction in EFL classrooms.

2. Understanding Futurity in English Language

The expression of future time in English has long attracted the attention of linguists because English lacks a single morphological future tense comparable to those found in many other languages. Rather than relying on a dedicated inflectional form to indicate future events, English employs a variety of grammatical constructions that together constitute a complex system of future-time reference. This characteristic has generated considerable debate among grammarians and linguists regarding whether English possesses a future tense at all or whether futurity should instead be viewed as a semantic and pragmatic category expressed through multiple linguistic resources (Biber et al., 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985). As a result, the study of English futurity extends beyond traditional tense analysis to encompass the interaction of grammar, meaning, discourse, and communication. Modern linguistic descriptions therefore emphasize that future-time reference is best understood as a functional system of alternative grammatical choices rather than a single tense category.

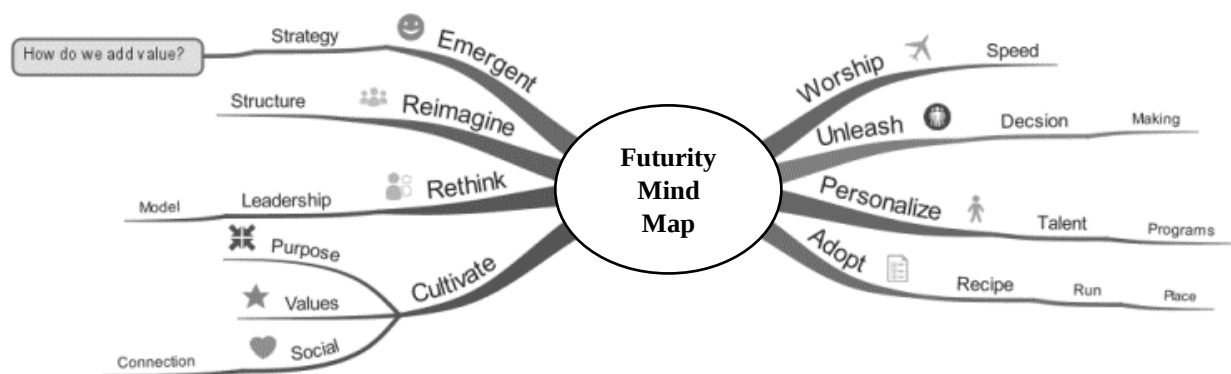


Figure 1: Futurity proof organization Mind map

Unlike languages that express future time through verbal inflections, English relies primarily on auxiliary verbs, aspectual constructions, and present-tense forms to refer to future events. Among the most frequently used constructions are *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, the future continuous, and the future perfect. Although these constructions all refer to events that occur after the moment of speaking, they differ considerably in the meanings they express and the communicative purposes they serve (Declerck, 2006; Downing & Locke, 2015). For example, *will* is commonly associated with prediction, spontaneous decisions, promises, and willingness, whereas *be going to* typically indicates prior intention or predictions based on present evidence. Similarly, the present continuous is generally used for planned arrangements, while the simple present often refers to scheduled events such as timetables and official programs. These distinctions demonstrate that future-time expressions are not interchangeable alternatives but rather meaningful grammatical choices that encode different relationships between the speaker and the anticipated event.

The selection of an appropriate future construction depends on a wide range of linguistic and contextual factors. Speakers choose among available future forms according to their assessment of certainty, intention, planning, prediction, obligation, or scheduling (Abouzied, 2026). The choice may also be influenced by the availability of present evidence, the degree of commitment expressed by the speaker, the communicative purpose of the utterance, and the relationship between the speaker and the listener (Biber et al., 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985). Consequently, grammatical accuracy alone is insufficient for the successful use of English future expressions. Learners and language users must also understand the semantic nuances and pragmatic functions associated with each construction in

order to communicate effectively in authentic situations. Another important characteristic of English futurity is the close interaction between grammatical form and discourse context (Hmouma, 2014). The same future construction may express different meanings depending on the communicative situation, while different constructions may sometimes refer to similar future events with subtle differences in emphasis or interpretation (Declerck, 2006; Downing & Locke, 2015). For instance, a speaker's choice between *will* and *be going to* often reflects differences in intention, evidence, or certainty rather than differences in temporal reference. Likewise, present-tense constructions may convey future meaning when the context clearly establishes that the event has not yet occurred. These observations illustrate that English future-time reference is fundamentally context-dependent and that successful interpretation requires attention to both linguistic form and communicative circumstances.

3. Cognitive Linguistic Approach to English Futurity

Cognitive Linguistics views language as an integral part of human cognition, emphasizing that grammatical structures are meaningful and reflect the ways speakers conceptualize their experiences. Rather than treating grammar as an autonomous system of formal rules, Cognitive Linguistics argues that linguistic forms emerge from general cognitive processes such as categorization, conceptualization, attention, and perception (Klila, 2025; Langacker, 1987, 2008). Consequently, the expression of future time in English is not simply a matter of selecting an appropriate grammatical form; it involves the speaker's mental representation of future events and the conceptual relationships between present circumstances and anticipated outcomes.



Figure 2: The Cognitive Linguistic Approach

One of the central assumptions of Cognitive Linguistics is that grammatical constructions encode distinct conceptualizations of reality. English future-time expressions therefore differ not only syntactically but also in the ways they construe future situations. For example, the modal auxiliary *will* is commonly associated with predictions, spontaneous decisions, promises, and volitional meanings. From a cognitive perspective, *will* represents the speaker's subjective assessment of a future event without necessarily relying on present evidence. In contrast, *be going to* conceptualizes the future as an extension of the present, often indicating pre-existing intentions or predictions based on observable circumstances (Langacker, 2008; Tyler & Evans, 2001). Thus, the choice between *will* and *be going to* reflects different conceptual perspectives rather than interchangeable grammatical alternatives.

Cognitive Linguistics also explains English futurity through the notion of construal, which refers to the different ways speakers mentally structure and present the same situation (Croft & Cruse, 2004). A future event may be construed as planned, inevitable, hypothetical, scheduled, or uncertain depending on the linguistic form selected. For instance, the present continuous (*I am meeting the manager tomorrow*) presents the future event as a concrete arrangement already integrated into the speaker's current plans, whereas the simple present (*The train leaves at 8 a.m. tomorrow*) conceptualizes the event as part of an established

schedule or institutional routine. These distinctions illustrate that grammatical choices reflect different cognitive perspectives on future events rather than merely different tense forms. Another important concept is prototype theory, which proposes that linguistic categories are organized around prototypical members rather than rigid boundaries (Lakoff, 1987; Rosch, 1975). Applied to English futurity, no single construction functions as the universal marker of future time. Although *will* is often introduced as the default future form in language classrooms, actual language use demonstrates that future-time reference is distributed across a network of related constructions with overlapping meanings and varying degrees of prototypicality. Learners therefore benefit from understanding future forms as members of a conceptual category centered on different communicative purposes instead of memorizing isolated grammatical rules.

Cognitive Linguistics further emphasizes the role of mental spaces in interpreting future events. According to Mental Space Theory, speakers construct temporary conceptual domains that allow them to imagine hypothetical, projected, or anticipated situations independently of present reality (Fauconnier, 1994). Future expressions invite listeners to establish mental spaces representing possible worlds, expected developments, or intended actions. For example, utterances such as *If it rains tomorrow, we will stay home* require interlocutors to construct an imagined future scenario whose realization depends on a particular condition (Tyler, 2012). Similarly, *be going to* often links a projected future event to evidence available in the present, creating a conceptual bridge between current observations and anticipated consequences. The Conceptual Metaphor Theory proposed by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) also contributed to understanding English futurity. Human beings frequently conceptualize time through spatial metaphors, treating the future as something that lies ahead while the past is viewed as behind. Expressions such as *looking forward to the weekend*, *the days ahead*, and *the years to come* illustrate how spatial experience structures temporal reasoning. These conceptual metaphors influence both everyday language and grammatical choices, enabling speakers to understand abstract temporal concepts through more concrete physical experiences.

4. Functional Linguistic Approach to English Futurity

Functional Linguistics views language as a resource for making meaning in social contexts rather than as a system of isolated grammatical rules. Unlike formal approaches that emphasize the structural properties of language, Functional Linguistics focuses on how speakers select linguistic forms to achieve particular communicative purposes. This perspective, developed primarily within Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), argues that grammatical choices are motivated by the meanings speakers intend to express and the social situations in which communication occurs (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). From a functional perspective, English does not possess a single grammatical future tense. Instead, futurity is realized through a network of grammatical constructions whose selection depends on communicative context, speaker intention, and discourse purpose (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Forms such as *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, and future perfect constructions each fulfill different communicative roles despite referring to future events. Their meanings emerge from the interaction between grammar, context, and the speaker's communicative goals rather than from temporal reference alone.

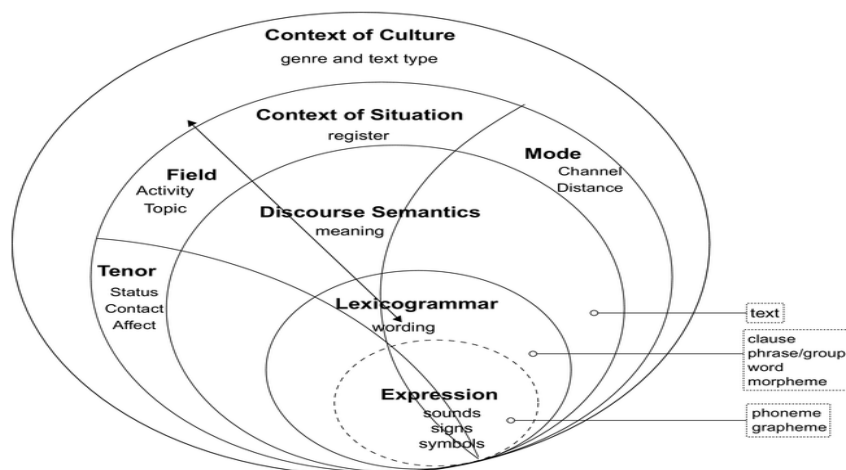


Figure 3: Systemic Functional Linguistics for L2 Teaching and Learning

One of the principal contributions of Functional Linguistics is its emphasis on the interpersonal function of language. Future constructions frequently express the speaker's attitudes, judgments, commitments, and relationships with listeners (Eggins, 2004). For example, *will* may indicate a prediction (*It will rain tomorrow*), a spontaneous decision (*I'll answer the phone*), a promise (*I will help you*), or a willingness to perform an action (*I'll carry your bag*). Although these sentences share the same grammatical construction, they perform different communicative functions that are determined by the discourse context and the interaction between speakers. Functional analysis therefore highlights that grammatical meaning cannot be separated from communicative intention.

The construction *be going to* also illustrates the importance of communicative function in expressing futurity. Functionally, it commonly signals prior intention or a prediction supported by present evidence. In the sentence *She is going to study medicine*, the speaker presents the future event as a planned intention, whereas *Look at those clouds; it is going to rain* expresses a prediction based on observable circumstances. These distinctions demonstrate that grammatical constructions encode different relationships between present reality and future events, allowing speakers to communicate varying degrees of certainty, preparation, and evidential support (Biber et al., 1999). Present-tense forms likewise perform important functional roles in future-time reference. The present continuous often expresses personal arrangements and fixed plans, emphasizing that preparations have already been made, as in *We are meeting the director next Monday*. In contrast, the simple present typically refers to scheduled or institutional events beyond the speaker's control, such as *The conference begins at 9:00 a.m.* These forms illustrate that grammatical choices are closely linked to discourse context and communicative purpose rather than simply indicating temporal location.

Systemic Functional Linguistics further explains futurity through the concept of metafunctions, which describe the simultaneous meanings expressed by every linguistic choice. The ideational metafunction represents experiences and events, enabling speakers to describe future situations and anticipated actions (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). The interpersonal metafunction expresses attitudes, modality, commitment, and social relationships, allowing speakers to negotiate certainty, obligation, promises, and intentions. The textual metafunction organizes information into coherent discourse, ensuring that future-time expressions contribute effectively to the flow of communication (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These metafunctions demonstrate that future constructions simultaneously convey temporal, interpersonal, and discourse meanings.

Functional Linguistics also assigns considerable importance to modality, which frequently overlaps with expressions of futurity. Modal expressions allow speakers to communicate varying degrees of certainty, probability, obligation, willingness, and prediction. The

auxiliary *will*, for example, retains modal characteristics despite its frequent association with future time (Palmer, 2001). Its interpretation often reflects the speaker's judgment rather than objective temporal reference. Similarly, other modal verbs, including *may*, *might*, *shall*, and *must*, can refer to future events while expressing different levels of certainty or obligation (Derewianka & Jones, 2016). This functional perspective reinforces the view that future-time reference is closely intertwined with modality and interpersonal meaning rather than constituting an independent tense category.

5. Comparing Cognitive and Functional Perspectives

Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics represent two influential approaches to the study of language that share a common rejection of purely formal descriptions of grammar. Both frameworks regard language as a meaningful system in which grammatical structures are motivated by human experience and communicative needs rather than by abstract syntactic rules alone. Despite this shared orientation, the two approaches differ in their theoretical assumptions, analytical focus, and explanations of how linguistic meaning is constructed.

Cognitive Linguistics	Functional Linguistics
Mental representations	Communicative functions
Conceptual meaning	Contextual meaning
Prototype categories	Language in use
Meaning construction	Social interaction
Conceptual metaphors	Functional choices

Table 1: Comparing Cognitive and Functional Perspectives

The primary distinction between the two perspectives lies in their treatment of meaning. Cognitive Linguistics explains linguistic meaning as a reflection of human conceptualization. Grammar is viewed as an extension of general cognitive processes, including categorization, construal, conceptual metaphor, and mental representation (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Accordingly, English future-time expressions are interpreted as different ways of conceptualizing future events. For instance, the distinction between *will* and *be going to* is understood in terms of how speakers mentally construe prediction, intention, evidence, and future possibilities rather than as a simple grammatical contrast (Langacker, 2008; Tyler, 2012). In contrast, Functional Linguistics interprets grammatical structures according to the communicative purposes they serve within social interaction. Language is regarded as a resource for creating meaning in context, and grammatical choices are explained by their contribution to discourse and interpersonal communication (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). From this perspective, future constructions such as *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, and the simple present are selected because they enable speakers to perform specific communicative functions, including making promises, expressing intentions, scheduling events, giving instructions, and predicting future outcomes.

The two approaches also differ in their explanations of grammatical variation. Cognitive Linguistics attributes variation primarily to differences in conceptualization. Speakers choose alternative future constructions because each construction highlights particular aspects of a future event through distinct cognitive processes (Croft & Cruse, 2004; Eggins, 2004). Functional Linguistics, however, explains variation through contextual and social factors, arguing that speakers select grammatical forms according to audience, communicative purpose, register, and discourse context. Thus, while Cognitive Linguistics focuses on how speakers think about future events, Functional Linguistics emphasizes how speakers use language to accomplish communicative goals.

Another important distinction concerns the role of context. Although Cognitive Linguistics acknowledges contextual influences on meaning, its primary concern is the relationship between language and human cognition. Functional Linguistics assigns context a central

theoretical role, maintaining that linguistic meaning cannot be fully understood without considering the situational and cultural environments in which communication occurs (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Despite these differences, the two approaches are highly complementary rather than contradictory. Cognitive Linguistics explains the conceptual foundations that motivate grammatical choices, whereas Functional Linguistics explains how those choices operate in authentic communication. Together, they provide a comprehensive account of English futurity by connecting conceptual meaning with communicative function (Tyler, 2012; Derewianka & Jones, 2016). For example, the sentence *I am going to visit my grandparents next weekend* can be analyzed cognitively as representing the speaker's prior intention and mental commitment to a future action, while functionally it serves to inform listeners of an existing arrangement within a particular communicative context. The two interpretations illuminate different but interconnected aspects of the same linguistic expression.

6. Challenges of English Futurity for EFL Learners

The acquisition of English future-time expressions presents considerable challenges for learners of EFL. Unlike languages that encode future time through a single morphological tense, English employs multiple grammatical constructions to express futurity, each associated with distinct semantic, pragmatic, and discourse-related meanings. Consequently, learners must develop not only grammatical knowledge but also an understanding of the contextual and communicative factors that govern the selection of appropriate future forms.

One of the primary difficulties lies in the absence of a single future tense in English. Many EFL learners expect a one-to-one relationship between grammatical form and temporal meaning, often assuming that the auxiliary *will* functions as the universal marker of future time (Biber et al., 1999; Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). While *will* is widely used to express futurity, it represents only one of several available constructions. Other forms, including *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, and future perfect constructions, convey different meanings depending on intention, planning, prediction, scheduling, or completion. Distinguishing among these alternatives requires learners to move beyond rule memorization toward a deeper understanding of language use (Quirk et al., 1985; Downing & Locke, 2015). Another significant challenge concerns the semantic differences among future constructions. Learners frequently confuse forms that appear structurally similar but encode different conceptual meanings. For example, *will* generally expresses spontaneous decisions, predictions, or promises, whereas *be going to* often signals prior intention or predictions based on present evidence. Similarly, the present continuous indicates arranged future events, while the simple present is typically used for scheduled or timetabled activities. Because these distinctions are largely semantic and contextual rather than purely grammatical, learners often struggle to select the most appropriate construction in authentic communication (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Declerck, 2006). Pragmatic competence represents another area of difficulty. The interpretation of future-time expressions depends heavily on discourse context, speaker intention, and interpersonal relationships. Identical grammatical forms may perform different communicative functions depending on the situation. For instance, *I will help you* may function as a promise, an offer, or a voluntary decision, whereas *You will submit the assignment tomorrow* may express a prediction or an instruction depending on the context. Learners who focus primarily on grammatical form often overlook these pragmatic nuances, leading to inappropriate language use despite grammatically correct sentences (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014).

Mother-tongue interference further complicates the acquisition of English futurity. Learners frequently transfer grammatical patterns and conceptualizations from their first language when expressing future events in English. In languages that possess a dedicated future tense, students may expect English to operate according to similar principles and consequently

overuse *will* while neglecting alternative future constructions. Conversely, learners whose native language relies heavily on contextual interpretation rather than explicit grammatical marking may underuse future auxiliaries or produce ambiguous temporal references. Such cross-linguistic influence is a well-documented source of persistent grammatical errors in second-language acquisition (Ellis, 2008). The complexity of English modality also contributes to learners' difficulties. Expressions of futurity frequently overlap with modal meanings such as certainty, probability, willingness, obligation, and prediction. For example, *will* retains modal characteristics that express volition or prediction, while modal auxiliaries such as *may*, *might*, *shall*, and *must* can also refer to future situations with varying degrees of certainty or obligation (Palmer, 2001). Recognizing these overlapping meanings requires sophisticated linguistic awareness that many EFL learners develop only gradually. Input-related factors may also hinder learners' mastery of English futurity (Tyler, 2012). Traditional grammar instruction frequently introduces future forms separately through isolated rules and mechanical exercises, providing limited opportunities for learners to observe how different constructions function in authentic communication (Biber et al., 1999). As a result, students may memorize grammatical patterns without understanding the conceptual and communicative motivations underlying their use. This form-focused approach often leads to overgeneralization, particularly the excessive reliance on *will* as the default future marker

7. Pedagogical Implications

The complexity of English futurity requires pedagogical approaches that extend beyond the presentation of grammatical rules and isolated sentence patterns. Since English expresses future time through multiple constructions rather than a single future tense, effective instruction should help learners understand not only the structural characteristics of future forms but also the conceptual and communicative meanings they convey. Integrating insights from Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics provides a comprehensive framework for teaching English futurity, enabling learners to develop grammatical accuracy, semantic awareness, pragmatic competence, and communicative fluency.

A cognitive linguistic approach encourages teachers to present future constructions as meaningful conceptual categories rather than independent grammatical forms. Instead of introducing *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, and the simple present as separate rules, instructors can emphasize the conceptual distinctions that motivate their use (Tyler, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). For example, *will* may be introduced as representing prediction, spontaneous decision, or willingness, whereas *be going to* can be explained as expressing prior intention or prediction based on present evidence. Visual timelines, conceptual diagrams, image schemas, and authentic scenarios can help learners establish meaningful associations between grammatical forms and the conceptual representations they encode (Langacker, 2008; Tyler, 2012). Prototype-based instruction also offers valuable pedagogical benefits. Cognitive Linguistics proposes that linguistic categories are organized around central or prototypical meanings rather than fixed rules (Lakoff, 1987). Accordingly, teachers can first introduce the most frequent and representative uses of each future construction before gradually presenting less typical or context-dependent uses (Croft & Cruse, 2004). Such an instructional sequence enables learners to build coherent conceptual networks instead of memorizing numerous disconnected grammatical exceptions, thereby reducing cognitive overload and facilitating long-term retention.

Functional Linguistics complements this conceptual perspective by emphasizing language use in authentic communicative contexts. From this viewpoint, grammar instruction should focus on why speakers choose particular future constructions in specific situations rather than merely how those constructions are formed. Classroom activities should therefore incorporate realistic communication tasks in which learners negotiate meaning, express intentions, make predictions, schedule events, and discuss future plans. Through contextualized practice,

students learn that grammatical choices depend on communicative purpose, interpersonal relationships, and discourse context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Task-based learning provides an effective means of implementing functional principles in EFL classrooms. Activities such as project planning, travel itineraries, interviews, role plays, debates, problem-solving tasks, and collaborative decision-making require learners to employ different future constructions naturally according to communicative needs (Ellis, 2003). For instance, students preparing a class event may use the present continuous to describe arrangements, *be going to* to express intentions, and *will* to make spontaneous decisions or promises during discussion. Such communicative tasks reinforce the functional distinctions among future forms while promoting meaningful interaction.

Explicit attention to form remains important, but it should be integrated with communicative practice (Mrghem & Klella, 2026). Teachers should encourage learners to compare similar future constructions, analyze contextual differences, and justify their grammatical choices (Biber et al., 1999). Activities involving consciousness-raising, guided discovery, corpus-based examples, and error analysis can help students recognize subtle semantic and pragmatic distinctions among future expressions. Such reflective learning encourages deeper grammatical awareness and promotes learner autonomy (Ellis, 2008). Recent developments in educational technology also provide opportunities for enhancing instruction on English futurity. Digital learning platforms, corpus-based resources, interactive simulations, and artificial intelligence (AI)-assisted language learning tools can provide immediate feedback on learners' use of future constructions while exposing them to authentic language examples (Godwin-Jones, 2023). AI-powered writing assistants and intelligent tutoring systems can help learners identify inappropriate future forms, compare alternative expressions, and understand the contextual factors influencing grammatical choice. When integrated thoughtfully into instruction, such technologies can complement teacher guidance and promote individualized learning experiences.

8. Integrating Cognitive and Functional Approaches

The complementary nature of Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding and teaching English futurity. While Cognitive Linguistics explains how speakers mentally conceptualize future events, Functional Linguistics demonstrates how these conceptualizations are realized through communicative interaction in specific social contexts. Integrating these perspectives enables researchers and educators to move beyond purely structural descriptions of future-time expressions and to adopt a more comprehensive view in which grammatical forms simultaneously reflect conceptual meaning and communicative function.



Figure 4: Functional Cognition Cycle

Both approaches share the assumption that grammar is meaningful rather than arbitrary. Cognitive Linguistics argues that grammatical constructions emerge from general cognitive abilities such as categorization, conceptualization, construal, and metaphorical thinking (Croft & Cruse, 2004). Functional Linguistics similarly maintains that grammatical choices are motivated by communicative purposes and are shaped by the social contexts in which

language is used (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Consequently, both frameworks reject the view of grammar as a collection of isolated rules and instead emphasize the close relationship between form, meaning, and language use. An integrated perspective is particularly valuable for explaining the diversity of English future-time expressions (Thompson, 2014). For example, the choice between *will* and *be going to* can be interpreted cognitively as reflecting different conceptualizations of future events. The former often represents subjective prediction, willingness, or spontaneous decision-making, whereas the latter typically conceptualizes the future as connected to present intentions or observable evidence (Langacker, 2008; Tyler, 2012). At the same time, Functional Linguistics explains why speakers select one construction rather than another in particular communicative situations. The choice depends not only on conceptual meaning but also on discourse purpose, interpersonal relationships, genre, and register. Together, these perspectives provide a richer explanation than either approach alone.

The integration of cognitive and functional theories also enhances the analysis of contextual meaning. Cognitive Linguistics explains how speakers mentally construct future scenarios through mechanisms such as construal and mental spaces (Fauconnier, 1994), whereas Functional Linguistics examines how these conceptualizations are expressed through language to achieve interpersonal and textual goals. Consider the sentence *We are meeting the new manager next week*. From a cognitive perspective, the present continuous reflects the speaker's conceptualization of the event as a concrete arrangement already incorporated into current plans (Langacker, 2008; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Traditional grammar instruction often introduces future constructions separately and emphasizes rule memorization, leaving learners uncertain about the reasons for selecting one form over another (Tyler, 2012; Derewianka & Jones, 2016). A cognitive-functional approach encourages teachers to explain the conceptual meanings associated with each future construction while simultaneously demonstrating how these constructions function in authentic communication (Ellis, 2003). For example, learners can first explore the conceptual distinction between prediction and intention before practicing these meanings through role plays, problem-solving tasks, interviews, and authentic dialogues.

This integrated framework also supports learner-centered instruction. Rather than presenting grammar as a static body of knowledge, teachers can engage students in discovering how grammatical choices vary according to conceptual perspective and communicative purpose (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Langacker, 2008). Activities involving authentic texts, corpus examples, collaborative discussions, and contextual analysis encourage learners to reflect on why speakers choose particular future constructions. This process promotes critical language awareness and enables learners to develop more flexible and accurate language use.

9. Future Research Directions

Although considerable progress has been made in understanding English futurity from cognitive and functional linguistic perspectives, several areas remain underexplored, particularly in relation to EFL learning and teaching. Future research should move beyond theoretical descriptions of future-time expressions and examine how insights from Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics can be translated into effective classroom practices. Empirical studies investigating the pedagogical value of these approaches would contribute to bridging the gap between linguistic theory and language education.

One promising direction involves experimental studies comparing different instructional approaches to teaching English futurity. Most traditional grammar instruction continues to emphasize rule-based explanations of future constructions, whereas cognitive and functional approaches advocate meaning-oriented and context-sensitive instruction (Tyler, 2012; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). Future research could compare the effectiveness of these instructional models by examining learners' grammatical accuracy, conceptual understanding,

pragmatic competence, and long-term retention. Such studies would provide valuable evidence for curriculum design and teacher education (Ellis, 2008). Another important area concerns corpus-based investigations of English future-time expressions. Large learner corpora and native-speaker corpora can reveal patterns of frequency, variation, and learner error across different contexts and proficiency levels. Corpus analyses would help identify which future constructions learners overuse, underuse, or misuse and how these patterns differ from authentic native-speaker usage. The findings could support the development of data-driven instructional materials that reflect real language use rather than simplified textbook examples (Biber et al., 1999). Cross-linguistic research also deserves greater attention. Since learners' first languages influence their interpretation and production of English future-time expressions, comparative studies involving learners from different linguistic backgrounds could provide deeper insights into the role of language transfer. Investigating how speakers of Arabic, Chinese, Spanish, Turkish, or other languages conceptualize and express future events may help explain common learning difficulties and inform the design of context-specific teaching strategies (Ellis, 2008). Such research would contribute to both second language acquisition and contrastive linguistics.

Future studies should also examine the development of pragmatic competence in the use of English futurity. Existing research has primarily focused on grammatical accuracy, whereas relatively little attention has been given to learners' ability to choose appropriate future constructions according to discourse context, interpersonal relationships, register, and communicative purpose. Longitudinal studies tracking learners' pragmatic development across different proficiency levels would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how future-time expressions are acquired in authentic communication (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Thompson, 2014). Advances in educational technology present additional opportunities for research. Artificial intelligence (AI), intelligent tutoring systems, corpus-based writing assistants, and adaptive learning platforms have transformed language education by providing personalized feedback and authentic language input ((Klella & Mrghem, 2024; Godwin-Jones, 2023). Future investigations should explore how AI-assisted learning environments influence learners' understanding and production of English future constructions. Klella (2026) stated that technology-enhanced instruction alongside traditional classroom methods could identify effective strategies for integrating digital tools into grammar teaching.

Another promising direction involves multimodal approaches to teaching futurity. Cognitive Linguistics emphasizes conceptualization through visual representation, suggesting that timelines, image schemas, diagrams, animations, and interactive simulations may facilitate learners' understanding of future-time concepts (Borg, 2015). Empirical research evaluating the effectiveness of multimodal instructional materials could provide valuable evidence regarding their impact on learners' conceptual understanding and communicative performance (Langacker, 2008; Tyler, 2012). Teacher cognition and professional development constitute another important area for future investigation. Teachers' understanding of English futurity and their beliefs about grammar instruction significantly influence classroom practice

10. Conclusion

English futurity represents one of the most complex domains of English grammar because future-time reference is expressed through a network of grammatical constructions rather than a single inflectional future tense. Throughout this paper, it has been argued that understanding English futurity requires more than a structural description of grammatical forms. The diverse functions of *will*, *be going to*, the present continuous, the simple present, and other future-time expressions demonstrate that the choice of a future construction is influenced by conceptual, semantic, pragmatic, and contextual factors.

The cognitive linguistic perspective provides valuable insights into how speakers conceptualize future events through mechanisms such as construal, categorization, conceptual metaphor, and mental representation. It explains why different future constructions encode distinct perspectives on intention, prediction, planning, certainty, and evidence, thereby enabling learners to understand the conceptual motivations behind grammatical choices. In contrast, the functional linguistic perspective emphasizes language as a resource for communication, demonstrating how future-time expressions perform interpersonal, ideational, and textual functions within specific social and discourse contexts. Together, these approaches reveal that English future constructions are not interchangeable grammatical alternatives but meaningful linguistic resources selected according to both conceptual representation and communicative purpose.

The paper has also highlighted the considerable challenges that English futurity presents for EFL learners. The absence of a dedicated future tense, the semantic overlap among future constructions, the interaction between futurity and modality, pragmatic complexity, and first-language influence all contribute to persistent learning difficulties. Traditional grammar instruction, which often emphasizes rule memorization and decontextualized practice, may not adequately address these challenges. Instead, learners benefit from instructional approaches that integrate conceptual understanding with contextualized communication, allowing them to appreciate both the meanings and the functions of alternative future-time expressions.

From a pedagogical perspective, integrating Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics offers a comprehensive framework for teaching English futurity. Cognitive explanations enable learners to recognize the conceptual distinctions among future constructions, while functional analysis illustrates how these constructions operate in authentic communication. Classroom practices that incorporate meaningful interaction, authentic language materials, task-based activities, corpus-informed examples, visual representations, and reflective grammar instruction can foster deeper grammatical awareness and improve learners' communicative competence. Such an integrated approach encourages learners to move beyond mechanical rule application toward flexible and contextually appropriate language use.

The discussion of future research directions has further demonstrated that English futurity remains a productive area for investigation. Empirical studies examining cognitive-functional instructional models, corpus-based analyses, cross-linguistic comparisons, pragmatic development, teacher cognition, multimodal learning, and technology-enhanced instruction have the potential to expand current understanding of how future-time expressions are acquired and taught. Advances in artificial intelligence, corpus linguistics, and digital learning environments also offer new opportunities for developing innovative approaches to grammar instruction that are informed by both linguistic theory and educational practice.

In conclusion, the integration of Cognitive Linguistics and Functional Linguistics provides a holistic perspective on English futurity by connecting grammatical form, conceptual meaning, communicative function, and pedagogical practice. This integrated framework contributes not only to theoretical linguistics but also to English language education by offering principled explanations of how future-time expressions are conceptualized, interpreted, and used in real-world communication. As English continues to function as a global language, fostering learners' ability to select appropriate future constructions accurately and meaningfully will remain an essential objective of EFL instruction. Future research and classroom innovation should therefore continue to build upon cognitive and functional insights to support more effective teaching, deeper linguistic understanding, and greater communicative competence.

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