

# **On Teaching Future Time to EFL Learners: Problems and Solutions**

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### **Abstract:**

This study in all its overall presentation seeks to give a comprehensive account of the difficulties involved in teaching future time to students who learn English as a foreign language; and the (pedagogical) solutions humbly suggested for learners, teachers, text-book writers, linguists and psychologists since they are expected to be the best who can deal with the problems that impede the acquisition of the foreign language concepts. The work like many language teachers' works is a reaction to the frustrating state of the students who cannot use their knowledge in a real communicative situation. It spotlights the reasons of students' inefficient use of the English future structures; and

projects, through a questionnaire, the most possible reasons of this problem propounding some useful techniques to overcome the problem depending on what is written in the literature of language learning and teaching. The study tackles the topic of tense and time as an entrance to investigate the nature of future structures. Apart from presenting a pedagogical view of future time references, it provides almost all the constructions used to express futurity and the indications they refer to getting use of the idea of Fleischman's time-line. The study ends with many results, findings and pedagogical suggestions.

Keyword: Futurity, Pedagogy and pedagogical grammar, EFL acquisition, Tense and time, Time-Line

### ملخص الدراسة

حول تدريس الزمن المستقبلي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: مشاكل وحلول

د. كاظم ناجي عبيد الرفاعي

قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها

كلية الآداب - جامعة فيلادلفيا

تعنى هذه الدراسة في مجملها بتقديم عرض للمشاكل المتعلقة بتدريس الزمن المستقبلي لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية والحلول التربوية والتعليمية التي يقترحها الباحث ويضعها أمام أنظار المعنيين بهذه المشكلة من الطلبة والمعلمين وواضعي الكتب المنهجية واللغويين وغيرهم من المتخصصين بالعلوم التربوية والنفسية في محاولة لدراساتها ومعالجتها. وكغيرها من الدراسات تعتبر هذه الدراسة رد فعل لحالة الإحباط التي يعاني منها هؤلاء المتعلمون

الذين يبدو أنهم غير قادرين على استخدام معرفتهم اللغوية في المواقف الحقيقية للاتصال أو التواصل. وتلقي الدراسة ضوءاً على الأسباب التي تقف وراء عدم قدرة الطلبة على استخدام قواعد اللغة وتراكيبها وخاصة ما يتعلق منها بموضوع الزمن في اللغة الإنجليزية كمدخل للحديث عن الزمن المستقبلي والتراكيب المستخدمة للتعبير عنه ووضع مقترحات لمعالجتها وتجاوزها. وتقدم الدراسة إجمالاً لكل الصيغ والتراكيب المستخدمة للتعبير عن المستقبلية والمعاني التي تدل عليها مستفيدة من فكرة "خط الزمن" التي جاء بها Fleischman. وتنتهي الدراسة إلى العديد من النتائج والمقترحات التعليمية الأخرى.

### 1. Introduction: A Preamble

Teachers most often find themselves write about language teaching as they don't expect outsiders to find solutions for the problematic areas of their job. They are the most efficient personals to deal with these problems as they are both trained to deal with them and have been coexisting together.

Nassir, A., Kadhim, N. and Ahmed, M. (1994: 4) state, "As teachers of English for a considerable amount of time, we have found that the most strenuous problem that faces our students is the English grammar, as years of formal instruction and painful efforts seem to be futile."

Likewise, a teacher has to provide opportunities and situations to invoke his students' psychological apparatus and mental power to harness their senses such as sight, hearing, imagination and ability to generalize and find facts by their own. It is widely believed that nowadays language learning is an individual process; the learner should exert efforts, make serious attempts to learn and

realize by his own the significance and value of every grammatical point; and then to become consciously aware of it.

This work like many language teachers' works is a reaction to the frustrating state of our students who are supposed to be linguistically competent but they cannot use their knowledge in a real communicative situation. It is an attempt to investigate the reasons of students' inefficient use of the English grammar; and project the most possible reasons of this problem propounding some useful techniques to overcome this problem.

Relatedly, it can be hypothesized that the most critical reasons for students' inefficiency of EFL future structures are the following:

1. The pedagogy of presenting the topic of futurity. That is the approaches teachers follow to implement such a goal.
2. The interference of the learner's mother tongue with English as a foreign language.
3. The nature of English tenses and the complexity of the structures used to express futurity.

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The present writer believes that language learning is not restricted to the class environment. In other words, the most efficient learning is fruitfully achieved through a combination of various activities in the class and outside it. Likewise, the writer thinks it is of no use to be dogmatic as a language teacher should cater for his students needs and modify the techniques he uses for this purpose. Being the master of all situations, the teacher is the most influential factor in the process of teaching; he is much more important than the text-book and the method of teaching.

Having believed that teachers, text-book writers, linguists and psychologists are expected to tackle the problems that impede the acquisition of the foreign language, the researcher as a teacher, intends to contribute in finding out subtle techniques and activities for the process of teaching/learning future structures. However, this study is a humble trying to achieve this goal. Other attempts are expected to be more comprehensive and serviceable.

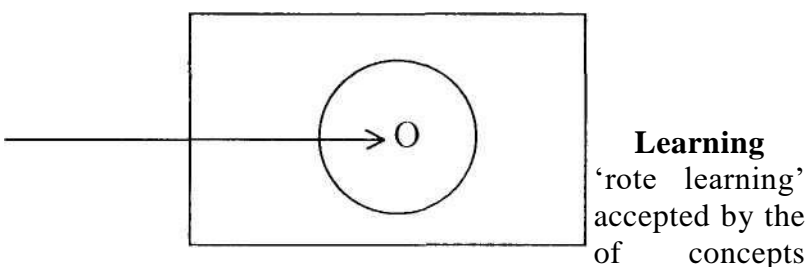
### 2. Pedagogy and Pedagogical Grammar

The design of a pedagogical grammar must be conceived in such a way that makes the learning task effective. In this regard, Ausubel (1968: 100) believes that the art and science of presenting ideas and information effectively is one principal function of pedagogy. Thus, the crucial (A 'bit' of information) **O**

underlying principle of the cognitive approach is to link new ideas and information to ideas and information already exist in the learner's cognitive structure. Chastain (1971: 87) figures out this cognitive view stating that "cognitive theory maintains that the mind processes information to be learned. In order for this process to be maximally efficient, the material must be meaningful. The mind is not a computer. It does not simply absorb information in bits and pieces. The indications refer to the material it organizes into meaningful chunks which it relates to information already contained in the individual's cognitive structure. The material is then stored for future use. The fact that meaningful relationships enhance learning does not imply that rote learning is impossible, but that it is less efficient and less productive." In according with such a viewpoint, new information can be handled in four possible ways. Smith (1978: 39-41) figures out four diagrams to illustrate these ways. The first diagram denotes 'meaningful learning' where new information is accepted by the learner and subsumed in a concept already existing in the cognitive structure.

Cognitive Structure

**Diagram (1). Meaningful**  
The second diagram indicates where new information is learner and kept independent already learned.

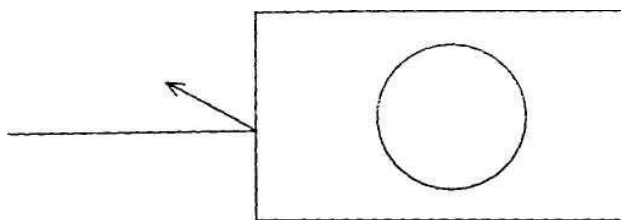


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### Diagram (2). Rote Learning

The third diagram shows how new information is not accepted by the learner.

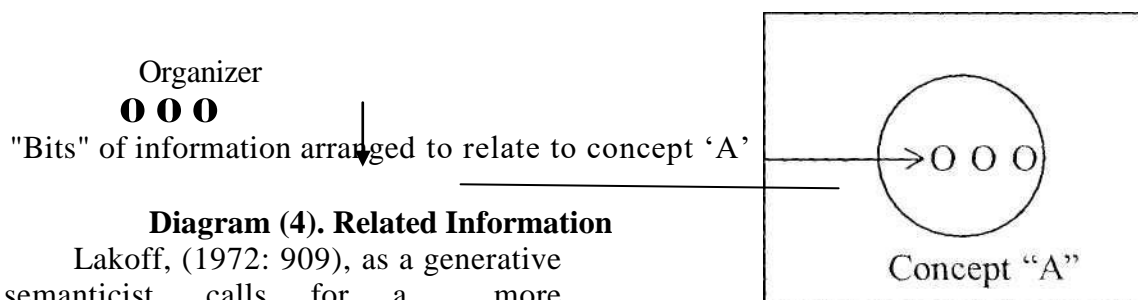
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### Diagram (3). Rejected

#### Information

The fourth diagram illustrates how new information is organized by the pedagogy and accepted by the learner who already has the concept A in his cognitive structure.



### Diagram (4). Related Information

Lakoff, (1972: 909), as a generative semanticist, calls for a more comprehensive view thinking that "there are areas of linguistic competence that cannot be described in any theory that does not allow an integration of information about the context in which the discourse takes place, sometimes erroneously referred to as the 'real world' as opposed to 'linguistically relevant' situation and the purely linguistically relevant information the sentence seems to convey: superficial syntax, choice of lexical items, and semantics aside from contextually relevant meaning elements." The same writer (ibid) suggests that "applied linguists would do well cooperate more closely. Such linguists know where second/foreign language learners make mistakes and what kind of errors they make. Thus in this area, as in many others, progress can best be made by theoretical and applied linguists if they will work together as equal partners." (P. 73).

The grammar thus provides a ready-made program in a condensed form.

This is for the teacher and/or textbook writer to exploit as he/ she wishes, developing the semantic and pragmatic themes according to his/her special needs.

However, the grammar should lend itself particularly to exploitation by those of cognitive persuasion in learning psychology. Likewise, Keuleers (1974: 253) applies and develops English' ideas of mediators, which are language teaching organizers of various sorts, and help the learner to bridge the gap between the conscious application of rules and the automatic fluency that characterizes the native speaker. To Keuleers (ibid) these mediators should be complete, concise, accurate and appealing; in his terms, some of them are pictorial but most of them are explicit. These could be easily adapted to cognitive drills which require highly condensed semantic information for instantaneous acquisitions by the learner. This amounts to saying that language pedagogy includes its major component, pedagogical grammar (or 'pedagogical

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linguistics', (cf. Smith 1972), has its own set of principles. Thus, and as thought by Thornbury (2002), pedagogical grammars should be constructed in a principled way and in accordance with the criteria which are independent of pure linguistic studies.

### **2. The Topic of 'Tense' and 'Time'**

The rapidly accumulating research on tense and time is striking; and for a long time, English teachers have blurred the formal distinction between 'time', 'tense', and 'aspect'. In most treatments of English tenses, the language teacher cannot help sensing a significant amount of confusion and overlapping between the concepts of 'tense' and 'time' and the nature of their syntactic and semantic relationship.

Crystal (1985: 306) refers to 'tense' as "a category used in the grammatical description of verbs referring primarily to the way the grammar marks the time at which the action denoted by the verb took place". Stechow (1995:13) thinks that perhaps it is best to regard 'tense' as a formal syntactic verbal category and leave the term 'time' for the semantics of verbal forms. Considering 'time' an universal concept with three divisions of past, present, and future, McCawley (1971), Murphy (1994:17), Dahl (2000) and Leech and Svartvik (2002:415) support such a tendency stating that "by tense we understand the correspondence between the form of the verb and our concept of time." In teaching language, however, we cannot keep to the safety of syntax. We have to teach meaning, and we have to come to grips with the problems of the semantic categories related to time reference. It is necessary to provide the learner with the means of referring to the different dimensions of time and teach him/her the more sophisticated notional aspects of time reference available in the native language.

It is remarkable that EFL learners face a great deal of difficulty when trying to master the English tense-aspect system. EFL learners are exposed to the forms of tense and time almost immediately in their earliest English classes or in any English speaking environment. The forms are superficially simple to understand but they pose problems for learners at all levels and at any stage of learning. Murcia (1983: 121) believes that the tense forms of any language are a selective rendering of the temporal distinctions one can logically make with reference to time in the real world. The system is selective because tense, in the structural sense, refers only to the inflections used with finite verbs to express past, present or future time.

### **3. A Pedagogical View of Future Reference**

It seems to the present writer that there is a sense of consensus among grammarians in believing that the future time causes persistent problems for learners even at the most advanced stages of proficiency. Jespersen (1961: 24) outlines "the various more or less unsettled ways whereby many languages find expression for the future" and attributes this inherent complexity to the fact that the future is by its nature uncertain. Shall and will, the most complicated in this area, provoke the applied linguist Close (1970: 43) to admit the "tangle of idiomatic and conflicting usage amongst native speakers."

The present researcher still remember the title of Curme' article (1913) who wonders whether "English has a future tense". Pence and Emery (1990:22) state that in its modern grammar, English seemingly has no future tense. Yet English provides the speaker with so many means of expressing future time, with which tense is allegedly bound up. The language

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teacher, however, urgently needs the simplification and some modal descriptions and much pedagogic treatment for this purpose.

Futurity in English, in most cases, is coloured by delicate nuances, which are mostly expressed implicitly; and this seems to be the main problem teachers and pedagogical grammarians are faced with. Shall/will + Vs, for example, is not the only means of expressing future time; i.e., there are other constructions such as 'be going' which is most commonly used in both spoken and written English. However, the occurrence of this structure is syntactically, semantically and even pragmatically restricted; needless to mention the extensive use of the 'simple present', the 'present progressive', etc., and the great confusion emerging out of such use. This is the view taken by such weighty authorities as Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston & Pullam (2002). Nevertheless, the preference of one construction is made according to one's particular competence. Thus, the situational use of one means may sound wrong, questionable or unacceptable in one other situation regardless its grammaticality. The following are examples given by Allen (1959: 117). Sometimes the baby is going to cry for hours. - She is going to know in a minute. - You are taking your medicine every three hours. - I shall go at once because I can see you will be rude to me.

### 4. Problematic Areas of Future Time

To spotlight the main difficulties Arab EFL learners are often faced with when trying to use the English constructions that express future time, the researcher prepares a questionnaire distributed to 50 Jordanian undergraduate students of the English Department at

Philadelphia University as subjects of study. The questionnaire contains the following questions:

- a. What do you know about the two terms: 'tense' and 'time'?
- b. Is 'future' a tense in English? If not, what is it then?
- c. What expressions and/or devices do you use to express futurity in English?
- d. Apart from 'shall' and 'will', is/are there any other marker(s) of future time in English? If yes, what is/are it/they?
- e. Which of the constructions given below refer(s) to future time?
  1. a) I shall/will leave.  
b) I shall/will leave tomorrow.  
c) She shall/will leave (tomorrow).
  2. a) I am going to leave.  
b) I am going to leave tomorrow.
  3. a) I will be leaving.  
b) I will be leaving tomorrow
  4. a) I am leaving.  
b) I am leaving tomorrow.
  5. a) I am to leave.  
b) I am to leave tomorrow.
  6. a) I am about to leave.  
b) I am about to leave tomorrow.
  7. a) My examination is tomorrow.  
b) I take the examination tomorrow.
  8. a) I intend to leave.  
b) I intend to leave tomorrow.
  9. a) I hope to pay you a visit.  
b) I hope to pay you a visit tomorrow.
  10. a) I may leave.  
b) I may leave tomorrow.
  11. a) I might/ could/ would/ should leave.  
b) I might/ could/ would/ should leave tomorrow.
  12. a) I was to leave.  
b) I was to leave tomorrow.
  13. a) I was about to leave.  
b) I was about to leave

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tomorrow.

14. a) I will have left by this time tomorrow.

b) I will have been leaving by this time tomorrow.

15. a) I wish I met you soon.

b) I bet she is coming

16. I asked the driver to hurry up. My plane left at six o'clock.

The analysis of the students' responses shows that 90% of the subjects have insufficient information about the topic of futurity in English although they claim that they know something insisting on regarding future as a tense; and only nine students seem to have no crucial background regarding whether future is a tense or not. Almost all students find it difficult to talk about such types as 'near future', 'immediate future', 'remote future', 'future in the past' and 'past in the future', for instance. Moreover, a remarkable percent of 86% hesitate to accept the idea that future can be expressed by structures such as the ones given in 5, 6, 7, 12b, 13b, and 16, where the verb form is simple present/past. Another group of

thirty-two students cannot imagine that verbs like 'wish', 'hope', 'expect', 'intend' and 'bet' indicate future time. The responses denote that many students suspect whether the verb structure or the time reference is to decide futurity.

A close look at such problems shows that English has many devices of expressing futurity with different realizations. These devices, whether similar to or different from the structures learners use in their native language, are regarded as one more factor that causes difficulties for EFL learners. That is difficulty may be chiefly caused by the learner's mother tongue. Likewise, faulty learning strategies and faulty teaching methods and materials are other aspects of difficulties.

### 5. Proposed Solutions

For more pedagogical success, the writer suggests the utilization of Fleischman's time-line (1982) where students are exposed to different diagrams that contain directions to how the structures of all divisions of time are constructed.

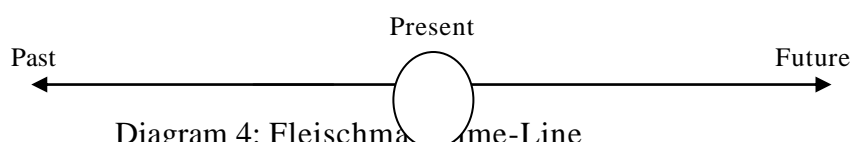


Diagram 4: Fleischman's Time-Line

Such diagrams make it easier for learners to realize the relation between tense and time: the first as a grammatical term concerned with the only two (past and present) marked forms of verbs; the second as a universal concept with its three divisions of past, present and future.

Likewise, the researcher suggests that students should be acquainted with the structures actually used to express future time and how such structures used to denote futurity with reference to the time-line. **The simple future**, for example, is commonly constructed in the way described in the following table.

subject	Auxiliary verb WILL	main verb
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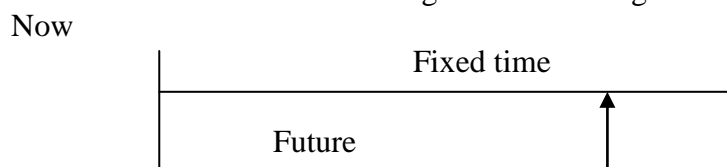
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	invariable	base
<b>We</b>	<b>will</b>	<b>work</b>

It can also be illustrated in a time-line diagram as the one given below.



This usage feels formal and impersonal. However, it is not very common except with travel arrangements. Here, the progressive can also be used to indicate the meaning of 'plan' or 'program', as in:

17 - Uncle Ben leaves tonight. His plane takes off at 10:00 p.m.

18 - According to the brochure, we stay in Rome for five days and then fly to Athens.

The simple future can be used in conjunction with the verb 'to think' as well as predictions:

19 - I think I will watch a movie.

20 - There will be a colony on Mars by

2050.

It can also be used to indicate a state of being, as:

21- I will be in Cairo.

This tense is also common for statements about the calendar and to describe immutable events or fixtures, as in:

22- Yesterday was Monday, today is Tuesday, and tomorrow is Wednesday.

23 - The match takes place on Friday evening.

24 - The first term starts at the beginning of October.

25 - Next Friday is my birthday.

**The future progressive** is formed as follows:

subject	+	auxiliary verb <b>WILL</b>	+	auxiliary verb <b>BE</b>	+	main verb
		invariable		invariable		present participle
<b>We</b>		<b>will</b>		<b>be</b>		<b>working</b>

It is used to indicate an action that occurs at a certain moment in the future. The action will start before the moment, but will not have finished. This is a very common usage which refers mainly to a personal arrangement, plan or program already exists now for the future.

26 - She will be studying for a long time.

However, it can also be expressed by the use of present progressive, as in:

27 - He is leaving tonight.

28 - Ali is having a meeting next week.

29 - I'm sending the letter this evening.

It should be noticed that the present simple is more likely to be used than the progressive when speaking of a series of proposed future actions, as in:

30 - We leave at six, arrive in London at twelve and then take the plane to Paris.

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A regards 'going to', Hageman (1989) thinks that such a structure is used to express 'prior decision' contrasts with 'will' (which indicates decision now (at the time of speaking)). Compare:

31 - I've put the kettle on because I'm going to have a cup of tea.

(already decided)

32 - Will you have a cup of tea?  
(decide now)

As stated by Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 48), the construction 'be + going to + Inf.' denotes future fulfillment of the present. It refers to specific meaning of future present intention and plan, certainty

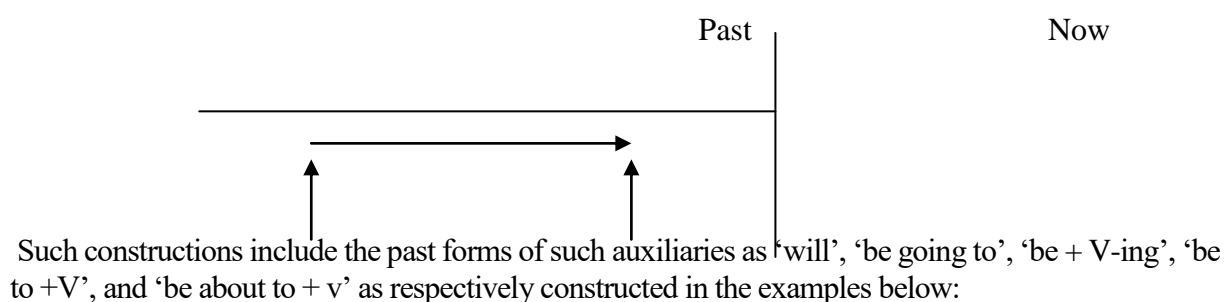
or cause, as in:

33- He's going to be a doctor when he grows up.

34- He is going to be 21 next December.

35- She is going to have a baby. (as she is pregnant now)

**The Future time in the past:** some of the future constructions can be used in the past tense to express time which is in the future when seen from a view point in the past as illustrated in the diagram below:



Such constructions include the past forms of such auxiliaries as 'will', 'be going to', 'be + V-ing', 'be to + V', and 'be about to + v' as respectively constructed in the examples below:

36- He said that he would lend me the money.

37 - He was going to lend me the money.

38- He was lending

39 - He

40- He was about to lend me the money the next week.

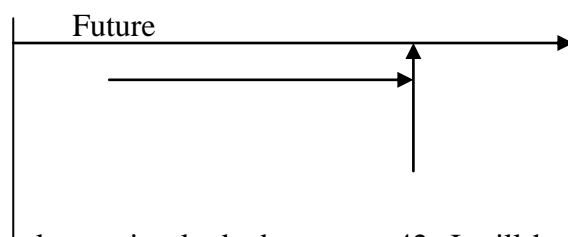
subject	+	auxiliary verb WILL	+	auxiliary verb HAVE	+	main verb
		invariable		invariable		past participle
We		will		have		worked

It is used to express an action in the future before another action in the future, too. In essence, it

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indicates past in the future.

Now



This describes a complete action looked at in imagination from a point in the future. It is used for an action which at a given future time will be in the past or will have just finished. Consider these examples:

41- He will have eaten all those bananas by the time he gets home.

:

42- I will have saved ten thousand dollars by the end of this year.

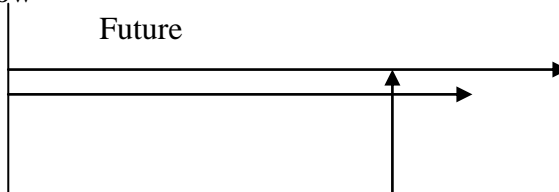
43- The football game will have finished before you leave work.

The structure of the **future perfect progressive**, on the other hand, is shown in the table below

subject	+	auxiliary verb WILL	+	auxiliary verb HAVE	+	auxiliary verb BE	+	main verb
		invariable		invariable		past participle		present participle
We		will		have		been		working

This structure is used to indicate incompleteness of activity at a given time in the future where the action at a certain point in the future will be in progress, i.e., a future on-going action with reference to some definite point we are thinking about in the future, as illustrated in the following diagram:

Now



Consider this example:

44- I will have been waiting for two hours when her plane arrives.

"Will have been waiting" is the on-going action; the definite point in the future is "when her plane arrives".

**Immediate future** especially imminent fulfillment of events (especially dangers likely to happen soon) is expressed by the

structure of (Be + about to), as in:

45- I am about to finish

46 - We are about to arrive at the station.

### 6. Findings

In the light of what has been investigated in this work, the researcher has arrived at the following:

1. In English, as in most Germanic

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languages, there is no future tense in the sense of a specific inflection that marks a verb for futurity after the fashion of the markers that appear in the preterit forms of the past tense, like Portuguese and French as Romance languages. Rather, the future tense is expressed by various grammatical structures of various tenses.

2. It seems to the researcher that one main reason for the difficulty of the future constructions containing modals, shall/will + Vs in particular, is that, in addition to futurity, we use them for various modal meanings such as: volition, obligation, etc. Such modal meanings may cause some problems since some of them are implicitly expressed whereas others are expressed by segmental as well as super-segmental features such as stress and intonation.

3. As is well known, future temporal adverbials are closely related to the time reference of the verb; and future time reference, in many cases, is the product of specific association between certain verb forms and future temporal adverbials. Hence, a sentence may be considered ungrammatical in case of incompatibility between the verb and the temporal adverbial. This leads to deviation.

4. The researcher finds out that the majority of Arab EFL learners seem to be unaware of all the means used to express the future time; and so they are stuck to the use of shall/will + Vs whenever they try to indicate an action, event, state, etc., to take place in the future. That is 'will/shall' have long been mistakenly described as the future tense for English but these are verbs of mood not tense. Both can be used in past, present and future expressions/structures.

5. Out of some interviews and meetings with some teachers of English and many university EFL students, the researcher

gets surprised to find that teachers and learners regard future as a linguistic notion actually used in the tense-system of English considering any other notion as very inconvenient and infusing for language purposes (of teaching and learning). Thus, we find them mix-up present tense, past tense and future in the same piece of discourse. One reason for this may be because they have learned the English tense system bit by bit at the sentence level without ever learning how the bits interact in longer pieces of discourse. Thus we may have:

47. My wife has a desire to visit Mecca again though she had been to that place in 2003. She may go there sometime next year.

6. Accordingly, it is evident that they have not been acquainted with the restrictive co-occurrence of the English tense-system and temporal adverbials.

7. EFL learners are ultimately unaware of such a fact that, in a text, the tense functions of the tense structures may be in conflict with those of adverbials. Remarkably, it is the adverbial which gives the correct clue to the tense relations of the events specified by the lexical verbs to their respective axes; it is found that in 70% of cases the future adverbial is required for a correct interpretation.

8. It is consequently found that Arab learners of English are ignorant of the different nuances that are implicitly expressed by the various constructions of future time. The choice of the correct future expression is one vexing problem for them. This could be attributed to the particular shades of meanings expressed by a variety of forms used to express futurity. And it is partly related to the interference of their native language where the modal meanings are expressed by lexical items.

9. The idea of planned futurity expressed

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by the 'present progressive' may be difficult for Arab learners to recognize. That is because Arabic does not distinguish between verbs for planned futurity and for prediction. Thus they may produce erroneous sentences like:

48. \* It is raining tomorrow.

The same is true when talking about the reason why EFL learners are unaware of the case of certainty that accompanies future events, states, actions, etc., expressed by the 'simple present' to denote future time. It seems that Arab learners may be insufficiently told about the similar meaning expressed by the Arabic 'imperfect' used for the same purpose.

10. EFL learners may be strongly influenced by the word order of their mother tongue. Thus, such a sentence as:

49. \*Travels my son to Amman tomorrow;

in which the verb 'travels' precedes its subject, is expected. Similarly, they might reverse the subject-verb positions producing a sentence like:

50. \*Will travel my son to Amman tomorrow.

11. Arab EFL learners, for example, may make false formal analogies in Arabic. They may not inflect the verb for the third person singular, due to the absence of such a formative phenomenon in their mother tongue; and so, they produce such an ungrammatical sentence as:

51. \*He travel tomorrow.

Similarly they may omit the (-ing) progressive inflection producing wrong constructions, as in:

52. \*He is travel to Amman tomorrow.

53. \*He will be travel to Amman tomorrow.

Conversely, they may inflect the main verb for tense or person due to the presence of such inflections in Arabic producing

wrong sentences like:

54. \*He will travelled to Amman.

55. \*He would travelled to Amman.

56. \*He will travels to Amman.

12. The distribution of verb 'to be' may cause difficulty to Arab learners of English, due to the absence of such a formal phenomenon in Arabic. Thus, they may produce an ungrammatical sentence like.

57. \*The guests is leaving in few minutes.

Likewise, they may drop the present tense form of the verb 'to be' and produce wrong structures like:

58. \*The guests going to leave Jordan.

59. \*The guests about to leave Jordan.

60. \*The guests to leave\_Jordan soon.

13. Formal similarities between English and Arabic may conceal functional dissimilarities. It is possible to find two verbal constructions formally similar, yet they cover deferent ranges of time and have different functions. Ignorant of this fact, Arab EFL learners may enormously use 'will + Vs' to indicate hypothetical future. Conversely, formally different verbal constructions may refer to similar ranges of time and indicate similar functions, like 'would + Vs' when used to indicate future time. Consequently this can be considered problematic for Arab learners.

14. Another complexity is the interrelationship between the verb forms and their time references. In English a past form may have a future time reference, or a present form may have a past time reference. This presents a considerable difficulty to Arab learners of English. For instance, it would not be easy for them to use the structure 'would + Vs' to indicate future time in a sentence like:

61. They would come to Jordan next month.

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15. The researcher finds out those Arab users of English mix-up present tense, past tense and future in the same piece of discourse. One reason for this may be that they have learned the English tense system bit by bit at the sentence level without ever learning how the bits interact in longer pieces of discourse. In this regard, the researcher suggests that tenses of English as a foreign language should not be taught in isolation. The EFL learner should learn how these bits interact in longer pieces of discourse, noticing that combination of tenses is possible if each tense is used appropriately to express the exact intended meaning.

16. Temporal clauses constitute one more problem for Arab learners of English. They are likely to make mistakes similar to the following typical examples given by Ridont and Manson (1972:623).

62. \*I will tell you as soon as I will know.

63. \*I will be back before you will have left.

64. \*I will be happy when I will return to my nation.

17., In addition, one can imagine what kind of difficulty EFL learners are faced with when trying to choose one future device since the choice of one way rather than another is determined by contextual, psychological and/or linguistic factors. In other words, to a non- native speaker of English, the choice of the correct future expression is far from being easy. This is likely to be attributed to the various nuances of meaning expressed by these forms.

18. Finally, we must point out that "ESL textbooks and reference grammars often provide somewhat oversimplified information" (Close 1983: 340). As far as futurity is concerned, several grammars refer to such a conditional structure like:

65. If I meet him, I will tell him the

truth;

as 'real' or 'possible' as opposed to the sentences:

66. If I met him, I would tell him the truth.

67. If I had met him, I would have told him the truth; which refer to the 'unreal' and 'hypothetical' present and past.

### 7. Pedagogical Suggestions

Now, it can be gathered that futurity may constitute a bar to clarity in communication both spoken and written. It is proposed that syllabus designers, text-book writers and teachers should be alert not to fall in the trap of expressing future time while making syllabuses, producing teaching materials or teaching English. Users of English, especially the Arabic ones, think that expressing future time does not embarrass them, since they use it conveniently to serve their purposes.

To those who may benefit out of this study, a considerable number of pedagogical patterns and situations are suggested here in addition to the ones made by other (pedagogical) grammarians.

1. It is believed that a successful teaching of grammar largely depends on the selection of important grammatical items and the order in which these items are to be taught. Both the syllabus and the textbook should meet these requirements. Edmonton et al (1977: 10) state that "there are three main criteria that could be taken into account to decide what to teach and when to teach it: the relative frequency of occurrence of the grammatical item, the relative learning difficulty this grammatical item poses, and the degree to which this item is essential for (classroom) communication."

2. It is assumed that items with higher frequency should be learnt earlier than with lower frequency, since their frequency

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determines their relative usefulness. There are two kinds of priority in teaching: priority in sequencing the teaching items, and the amount of work the teachers and the learners direct to each of the teaching items. This principle has to be applied to the teaching of futurity in English. It would be gradually done in the following manner:

(a) The various future forms in English should be introduced in terms of their relative frequency of use.

(b) While introducing a form, one should first concentrate on its basic use.

(c) After its basic use is established, only then the use of the other forms should be introduced.

(d) More time should be spent on the uses for which there is no one- to-one correspondence between English and Arabic than on the uses for which there is.

3. EFL learners should be acquainted with the restrictive co-occurrence of the English tense-system and temporal adverbials. They should be aware that, in a text, the tense-functions of the tense structures are in conflict with those of adverbials. This suggests the need for evolving an approach to the study of English time-relationships that can produce more learning.

4. Thus, the teaching points related to the future can be presented in the following manner:

- Introducing the future through a contextualized passage;
- Explaining its form and use;
- Practicing the future through the substitution table;
- Drilling in isolated sentences;
- Answering questions based on a contextualized passage;
- Composition;
- Contrasting the simple future with the future progressive for instance; (using the time line)

- Contrasting other future forms with each other and then with other tense forms; and

- Test.

5. Other suggestions may prove useful for those who are concerned with the teaching of English to Arab learners. These are:

a. It is known that futurity in English is expressed by a considerable number of devices used for other functions. Thus, it is advisable to teach Arab EFL learners all the forms and functions of every device in the tense system of English.

b. Teachers had better utilize any considerable similarity of future time constructions, Arabic and English manifest.

c. Departing from the linguistic truth that every language should be described in its own terms, constructions which have no counterparts in the mother tongue should be described in terms of the other language. This requires greater efforts on the part of the teacher and the learner as well.

d. The difficulty may be attributed to the degree of complexity of the English future construction itself. Such complex constructions should be paid much attention.

e. All syntactic and semantic terms related to futurity and forms of future time such as: notional, intention, volition, simple future, natural future, etc. should be entirely explained in such an accurate way that helps EFL learners interpret and know how to use them properly.

f. Moreover, entire comparison should be made between the cases in which one construction is used to indicate futurity and any other usage(s). This is expected to help EFL learners become aware of how to construct such structures and the functions they are used for. For example, and as Palmer (1971: 193) states, 'Will' is used for functions other

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than denoting future time as seen in the sentences given below.

68. I will come, if you ask me.  
(Willingness)

69. She will sit for hours. (Habit)

70. That will be John. (Probability)

71. Oil will float on water. (General truth)

### 8. Conclusion

Tracing the problem of expressing future time by learners of English as a foreign language, it is found that the major barriers are related to various factors. The first and most important is the pedagogy of presenting the topic of futurity. That is the approaches teachers follow to implement such a goal. A pedagogical grammar should be based on psychological principles more than any currently established linguistic theories. In other words, the pedagogical grammarian should appeal to appropriate psychological, sociological and linguistic aspects that help him/her set out language descriptions for the learner and the material writer. The second is the interference between mother tongues and English. It seems that EFL learners are highly affected by the structures of their native languages; and hence they are expected to produce similar structures when they try to express futurity in English. The third difficulty is related to the complexity of English tenses and its grammatical structures of future time, in particular, since they vary in number, use, and indication. It is then the job of both teachers and learners to exert as much efforts as possible to surmount such difficulties. As teachers are concerned, it is time to rethink of the methods they apply in the process of teaching the topic of tense and time in general and future structures in particular. In other words, they should

appeal to new pedagogical views and perspectives that help them improve the two simultaneous processes of teaching and learning. The ability of EFL learners should be improved in such a way that helps them efficiently use the various structures of future time in any (in)formal communicative situation.

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