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Expressing Future Time In Spoken Conversational English: A Corpus-based Analysis Of The Sitcom Friends

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EXPRESSING FUTURE TIME IN SPOKEN CONVERSATIONAL ENGLISH:

A CORPUS-BASED ANALYSIS OF THE SITCOM *FRIENDS*

by

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ABSTRACT

Far from being simply *will*, a survey of English grammar textbooks revealed that a multitude of expressions exists in the English language to express the future time. These expressions include, but are not limited to, *will, be going to,* the simple present tense, modals, the future perfect tense, and the present progressive tense. With so many choices and with a lack of direct relationship between tense and time, a language learner may certainly have difficulties in choosing which expression to use when attempting to produce a future utterance.

A corpus-based approach to analyzing real language has been demonstrated to be quite useful for the field of TESOL (Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1996; Biber & Conrad, 2001; Biber & Reppen, 2002) and numerous studies on the frequency of lexical and grammatical items of language have revealed salient features that otherwise would have remained unknown. Adding to this body of knowledge, the current study was an analysis of future expressions in spoken conversational English using the television sitcom *Friends* as a corpus. A careful analysis of 349,106 words from transcripts of 117 randomly selected episodes revealed that the most common expression of the future in the English language is the contracted form of *be going to* – *gonna*. The results of the study also revealed that only six future expressions emerged in this spoken conversational English from this corpus: *will, be going to,* the simple present tense, the present progressive tense, modals, and *be about to*.

This thesis is dedicated to the King, Jesus Christ, who gives me strength.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

BGT – Be going to

CL – Corpus Linguistics

EFL – English as a Foreign Language

ESL – English as a Second Language

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

An indispensable part of learning any language is its grammar. Grammar is the key by which one can begin to make sense of the language. It is the rules of the 'language game' (Wittgenstein, 1976) and without the rules, the game is meaningless. Therefore, for both language learners and educators, grammar in all its facets becomes an essential component to the second language classroom.

Language learners undertake not only the system behind the structuring of the target language, but they also must become acutely familiar with the parts themselves. In this case, the parts of the English language are in view. English may be broken down into eight traditional parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, interjections, and conjunctions. However, among these traditional eight parts of speech, the verb is undoubtedly the heart of the English sentence (Folse, 2009).

Verbs primarily express the *action* of any English utterance. They describe *what* the agent, or subject, *does*. For instance, what is Sarah doing right now? She *is writing* a paper. Ultimately what is tied into the fabric of verbs is the idea of *tense*. Tense generally refers to the time of the action, when it occurred, and how it is expressed by the verb (Folse, 2009). There are twelve verb tenses in English (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1 English Verb Tenses

Verb Tense	Example
Simple present	She works
Simple past	She worked
Simple future	She will work

Verb Tense	Example
Present progressive	She is working
Past progressive	She was working
Future progressive	She will be working
Present perfect	She has worked
Past perfect	She had worked
Future perfect	She will have worked
Present perfect progressive	She has been working
Past perfect progressive	She had been working
Future perfect progressive	She will have been working

The twelve English verb tenses are simple present, simple past, simple future, present progressive, past progressive, future progressive, present perfect, past perfect, future perfect, present perfect progressive, past perfect progressive, and future perfect progressive.

Statement of the Problem

What challenges many language learners is the misunderstanding that *tense* and *time* are synonymous. Tense and time are not necessarily equal to one another. Although the grammatical label clearly expresses a certain time function, the verb tense may actually be used to express a completely different time altogether. Take, for example, the present progressive tense as in *School is staring soon*. Although this statement has the present progressive tense in it, the sentence actually has a future meaning. The school being mentioned here is not actually starting *now* but at a future time close to the immediate present. In addition, to compound this issue even further, there actually exists a multitude of other English expressions to render the future

meaning. These expressions include, but are not limited to, *will*, the special constructions *be going to* and *be about to* and the modals *may, might, should,* and *could*. Table 1.2 presents each of the different future expressions in English with an example of its usage.

Table 1.2 Future Expressions in English

Form	**Example**
Simple Future	School will start soon.
Simple Present	School starts soon.
Present Progressive	School is starting soon.
Be going to	School is going to start soon.
Be about to	School is about to start.
Modals	School may start soon.
	School might start soon
	School should start soon.
	School could start soon.

With so many options to express the future, it is no wonder that language learners may struggle with these verb forms. Which ones should they use? When should they use them? The current study sought to answer these questions by examining future expressions in spoken English conversation. Since Quaglio and Biber (2008) have demonstrated that the television sitcom *Friends* accurately represents spoken English conversation, this study used this television series to demonstrate the most commonly used future expressions in conversation and explore the patterns of usage to account for native speaker choice of verb form.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the most frequently used future expressions in conversational English using a quantitative corpus-based method, examine patterns of usage, and

suggest how the findings in this study may be implemented in ESL teaching. The results of this research may help both teachers and material developers in the presentation of the future time in English by: (1) determining which expression to introduce to language learners specifically and (2) determining which expressions should be given teaching time and space in general.

Research Questions

There were two research questions that guided this research:

1. How do native speakers actually express future time in spoken conversational English?
2. From these expressions, which future expressions are the most common in spoken conversational English?

Limitations of the Study

This study calculated the frequency of future expressions in spoken English conversation. The corpus for this study derives from transcripts of the television sitcom *Friends*. The dialogue of this television show has been argued to represent spoken English conversation in the works of Quaglio and Biber (2006) and Quaglio (2008). It may be that *Friends* does not represent all of English.

In addition, the language of *Friends* represents a variety of English that may be generational, that is around ten years ago. Times have changed and language evolves through the passage of time. *Friends* also represents a certain age and class of speakers. Therefore, a corpus collected from *Friends* may not represent all native speakers of North American English.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

What are the future expressions in English?

Grammar

For teachers of English as second or foreign language, grammar plays a particularly crucial role in their students' acquisition of the English language. Non-native speakers want to know how to formulate English sentences to express themselves accurately and clearly. These learners want to know *why* the utterance "I can help you" is correct while "*I can to help you" is not. They also ask questions such as, "Why can't I say 'I'm understanding'?" or "What is the rule for using words like *really, always, and quickly*?" These *rules* for constructing English statements matter and make up what we know as grammar. Cowan (2008) rightly says about English grammar that it constitutes all of the "rules that govern the formation of English sentences, and this is precisely what learner of English want to know' (p. 3).

Grammar is the backbone of all language. It is the essential system that allows for meaningful dialogue across all languages. Without it, communication breaks down, and words become nothing more than sounds without distinction. Although a person may have a massive knowledge of vocabulary, if they are unaware of the rules which make these vocabulary items meaningful, their lexical knowledge becomes useless. In short, grammar may be defined as "the set of patterns that holds a language together. If vocabulary items such as words and idioms are the building blocks of a language, then grammar is the systematic glue that holds everything within a language together. Simply put, grammar is **the** foundation of a language..." (Folse, 2009, p. v, author's emphasis).

There have been two major approaches to the explanation of grammar – prescriptive and descriptive. Similar to how a doctor *prescribes* medication and the necessary steps a patient

should take in their health, *prescriptive* grammar seeks to explain grammar through what it should be like. It sets the rules that govern the language –what should and should do not be said. An example of this would be English teachers in elementary education who correct their students when they say "Where do you live at?" or "Where are you going to?" Prescriptive grammar says people *should not* have prepositions at the end of sentences like this. On the other hand, *descriptive* grammar explains what grammar is actually like. Using this same example previously mentioned, people do use dangling prepositions in everyday speech. This type of structure is the reality and the present condition of the grammar being used among speakers of English.

English grammar

English grammar has traditionally been described through the eight parts of speech. These have typically been considered the cornerstone of English grammar (Folse, 2009). English could easily be divided up into more than eight parts of speech; however the typical approach has been to almost always name only eight categories (Folse, 2009). The reason for dividing up the English language into *eight* categories originates in the 17th century. Scholars borrowed the eight categories of Latin grammar created by Donatus around 350 A.D. and applied them to English (Kolln and Funk, 2006). This view of how English should be categorized was only natural since at that time in history Latin was considered the ideal language; the language of scholarship, literature, and religion.

The eight categories, or parts of speech, are nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections. Simply put, nouns refer to people, places, and things, such as *the writer, school, a computer,* and *happiness*; adjectives describe nouns like the words *blue, fat,* and *rich*; verbs refers to the actions and states, such as *write* and *be*; adverbs describe the way or manner of the action being done, for example, "He writes *quickly*" and "We

usually go to school five days a week"; pronouns refer to a noun that has been previously mentioned, such as *he, she, it,* and *we*; prepositions show the relationship of a noun to the rest of the sentence like *at* home, *in* school, and *on* time; conjunctions are connecting words which join words, phrases, and clauses, for instance, *and* in "black and white," *or* in "to live *or* not to live," and *but* in "He likes her, *but* she doesn't like him"; and, finally, interjections which express strong feelings or emotion, such as *wow!, gosh!,* and *ouch!*.

Verbs in English

The heart of any English sentence is undoubtedly the *verb* (Folse, 2009). It shows the action or being (existence) of the agent and answers the question of "what does/did the subject do?" For example, what does a writer do? He *writes*; what did Melissa do last night? She *slept*; where is the dog? It *is* in the house. Verbs and their various forms not only carry part of the essential meaning of an English utterance but present some of the top two or three most difficulties for English language learners to master (Cowan, 2008). This challenge becomes clearer when you look further into the descriptions of verb forms and its various parts. For instance, verbs have four principal parts: base form (*to write*), past (*wrote*), past participle (*written*), and present participle (*writing*). Verbs can be further broken down into regular and irregular categories. For regular verbs, the past and past participle end with the same suffix *–ed*, such as *played, cooked,* and *jumped*. Irregular verbs, on the other hand, may use a variety of forms using the suffixes *–en* and *–ne*, internal vowel changes and sometimes no changes at all (Folse, 2009). Examples of these irregular verbs forms are *went* (from the verb go), *spoken* (from *speak*), and *shone* (from the verb *shine*). Learners generally have to memorize these various verb forms. However, how to use these verb forms is another story altogether. Verb forms, like the categories described previously, "indicate both time of the action expressed by the verb and the

speaker's view of that action in time, for example, as completed or ongoing, habitual or repeated" (Cowan, 2008, p. 350). Verb forms by this definition are usually referred to as *tense*. Therefore, verb tense may be placed at the heart of why verbs are considered one of the most challenging parts of English grammar.

English verb tenses

Verb tenses express the time an action occurs in relation to the moment of speaking (Cowan, 2008). The statement "I went to work" indicates a *past action* since the verb *went* is the past tense of the verb *go*. There are three dimensions of verb tenses - past, present, and future – and twelve verb tenses in total. The twelve verb tenses are *simple present*, *simple past*, *simple future*, *present progressive*, *past progressive*, *future progressive*, *present perfect*, *past perfect*, *future perfect*, *present perfect progressive*, *past perfect progressive*, and *future perfect progressive* (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1 English Verb Tenses

Verb Tense	Example
Simple present	She works
Simple past	She worked
Simple future	She will work
Present progressive	She is working
Past progressive	She was working
Future progressive	She will be working
Present perfect	She has worked
Past perfect	She had worked
Future perfect	She will have worked

Verb Tense	Example
Present perfect progressive	She has been working
Past perfect progressive	She had been working
Future perfect progressive	She will have been working

Of these tenses, there are noticeably four that express future time: simple future, future progressive, future perfect, and future perfect progressive. However, in the expression of a future time, there exist more possibilities than these four tenses (see Table 2.2).

Future expressions in English

Folse (2009) adds two more verb tenses and one "special verb expression" that express some aspect of future time (p. 139). The "special expression" mentioned here is *be going to* (BGT) and the other two tenses are present progressive and simple present (Folse, 2009). The construction of BGT employs the verb *be* + *going* + the *base form* of a verb (VERB). The statement *I am going to study this weekend* is an example of the BGT construction. Present progressive can be used as a simplified version of BGT. For example, the previous example *I'm going to study this weekend* could be shortened into the present progressive as *I'm studying this weekend* and retain the same future meaning. The exception to this is when a statement is a prediction, such as changing the sentence *Real Madrid is going to win the game today* to * *RealMadrid is winning a game today*. The simple present can also describe a future action but is limited to certain verbs, including *open, close, arrive, leave, start,* and *end* as in *The lab opens early tomorrow morning*; *The grocery store closes at 9PM*; *Her plane arrives in 10 minutes*; *The bus leaves soon*; *School starts again in 2 months*; and *The fair ends next week*. Cowan (2008) adds two more renditions of future time – *be about to* and *be to* (pp. 361-362). *Be about to*

expresses that an action is going to occur in the very near future, such as *She's about to leave home and go to the store. Be to* is relatively rare and is limited largely to contexts like commands, such as "You are to stay here with the patient until the doctor returns' (Cowan, 2008).

Table 2.2 Future Expressions in English

Form	**Example**
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Present Progressive	School is starting soon.
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Modals	School may start soon.
	School might start soon
	School should start soon.
	School could start soon.

Both Folse (2009) and Cowan (2008) agree that, among the variety of future time expressions, BGT and WILL stand out as the most common. This claim seems supported by the vast amount of literature devoted to explaining the relationship between these two future expressions alone (see Hall et al., 1970; Haegeman, 1989; McCartthy & Carter, 1995; Nicolle, 1998; Szmrecsanyi, 2003). Folse (2009) makes an interesting statement about the use of BGT and WILL in his *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learner*s: "The ultimate irony of the English verb tense to express future time is that we have a future tense that uses **will** +

VERB (*We will travel*), but we rarely use this future tense. Instead, it is much more common to use **be going to** (*We are going to travel*) … for future actions" (p. 138).

The question that arises is to what extent this statement about frequency is supported? How do we determine which future time expressions are more common? Based solely on intuition, the average native speaker may in fact agree that BGT and WILL are the most common expressions of future time. However, this notion about frequency appears to be completely lacking in empirical support. Empirical support here refers to how native speakers *actually* use the language, i.e. a *descriptive* account to the grammar of the English language

How do ESL/EFL grammar textbooks present future time?

Future time in ESL/EFL textbooks

ESL/EFL textbooks of varying proficiency levels reveal a lack of uniformity on how future time is *actually* rendered in English. Ten textbooks were surveyed from well-known publishing companies in the TESOL field. The ten ESL/EFL grammar textbooks are *Understanding and Using English Grammar* (Azar & Hagen, 2009), *Fundamentals of English Grammar* (Azar & Hagen, 2011), *Grammar and Beyond 1* (Reppen, 2012), *Grammar and Beyond 3* (Reppen, 2012), *Grammar in Context 2* (Ebaum, 2010), *Grammar: Form and Function 2* (Broukal, 2010), *All Star 4* (Lee, Sherman, Tanaka & Velasco, 2011), *Basic Grammar in Use* (Murphy & Smalzer, 2011), *Clear Grammar 1: Keys to Grammar for English Language Learners* (Folse, 2012), and *Grammar Connection: Structure Through Content* (Celce-Murcia &Sokolik, 2007) (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.3 Comparison of Grammat Textbooks on Future Expressions

Textbook Title & Student Level	**Chapter when Future Time is Introduced**	**Renditions of Future Presented in Order**	**Descriptions of Usage for BGT**	**Description of Usage for WILL**
Understanding and Using English Grammar (4th ed.) 2009 B. Azar & S. Hagen Pearson Intermediate to Advanced	Chapter 4 – pp. 60-73	1. WILL & BGT 2. Time Clauses 3. Present Progressive & Simple Present 4. Future Progressive 5. Future Perfect & Future Perfect Progressive	• Predictions about the future • Prior Plan	• Predictions • Willingness/Momentary decision
Fundamentals of English Grammar (4th ed.) 2011 B. Azar & S. Hagen Pearson Low-intermediate to Intermediate	Chapter 3 - pp. 55-77	1. BGT & WILL 2. Time Clauses & IF-clauses 3. Present Progressive 4. Simple Present 5. About to	• Predictions • Prior Plan	• Predictions • Momentary Decision
Grammar and Beyond 2012 R. Reppen Cambridge Beginning to Advanced	Part 11 – pp. 334-358	1. BGT or Present Progressive 2. WILL 3. May & Might 4. Offers and Promises	• Prior Plans/Intentions • Felt Certainty based on present evidence	• Predictions & Expectations • Certainty • Immediate Decision • Often use *I think, I suppose, I guess* before WILL statements • Adverbs with WILL for certainty: likely, possibly, probably, definitely

Textbook Title & Student Level	Chapter when Future Time is Introduced	Renditions of Future Presented in Order	Descriptions of Usage for BGT	Description of Usage for WILL
Grammar in Context 2 (5th ed.) *2010* S. Ebaum Heinle N/A	Lesson 2 – pp. 67-79	1. WILL 2. BGT 3. Time & IF-clauses	• Prior Plan • Predictions • Scheduled Events • Facts about the future	• No Prior Plan • Making an Offer • Making a Promise • Predictions • Scheduled Events • Facts about the future
Grammar: Form and Function 2 (2nd ed.) *2010* M. Broukal McGraw Hill Intermediate Students	Unit 3 – pp. 51-65	1. BGT 2. WILL 3. Present Progressive 4. Simple Present 5. Future Conditional (IF-clauses) 6. Future Time clauses	• Plans for future • Certainty	• Prediction • Momentary Decision
All Star 4 (2nd ed.) *2011* L. Lee et. Al McGraw Hill N/A	Unit 9 – pp. 191-193	1. BGT & WILL 2. Future Continuous	• Future Plans	• Offer Help • Momentary Decision
Basic Grammar in Use (3rd ed.) *2011* R. Murphy & W. Smalzer Cambridge Beginning to Low-Intermediate	Chapter 5 – pp. 26-29	1. Present Continuous 2. Simple Present 3. BGT 4. WILL	• Prior Plan/Intention • Certainty	• Prediction • Not for Prior Plan • Offering Something • Momentary Decision • Often use *I think* and *I don't think*

Textbook Title & Student Level	Chapter when Future Time is Introduced	Renditions of Future Presented in Order	Descriptions of Usage for BGT	Description of Usage for WILL
Grammar and Beyond 3 *2012* L. Brass et al. Cambridge Beginning to Advanced	Unit 5 – pp. 62-70	1. BGT, Present Progressive, & Simple Present 2. WILL 3. Future Progressive	• Intentions and Prior Plans • Can use expressions like *probably, most likely, I think, I believe* • Predictions • Expectations • Guesses • Certainty and adverbs of certainty possible	• Predictions • Expectations • Guesses • Requests • Offers • Promises • Momentary Decision • Certainty and adverbs of certainty possible
Clear Grammar 1: Keys to Grammar for English Language Learners (2nd ed.) *2012* K. Folse Univ. of Michigan Beginning	Chapter 11 – pp. 290-311	1. BGT 2. WILL	• Prior Plans • Predictions based on present evidence	• Talk about future time but more limited • Nor for Prior Plans
Grammar Connection: Structure Through Content *2007* M. Celce-Murcia & M. Sokolik Heinle Beginning	Lessons 27 & 28 – pp. 193-208	1. BGT 2. WILL	• Future Plans • Strong Predictions based on present evidence	• Predictions • Momentary Decision • Making Promises

The textbooks differ in when they present future time. One text presents future time as a grammatical point in the second lesson or chapter, while another introduces it in lessons 27 and 28. From there other texts place future time in the third and fourth chapters; two introduce it in the fifth chapter; another in the ninth; and the last two in the eleventh chapter. Proficiency level does not seem to influence the material developers' decision here. For example, Azar and Hagen's (2009) grammar text is geared toward intermediate to advanced level learners and present future time in the third chapter (pp. 60-73) while Murphy and Smalzer (2011) introduce it in chapter 5 in their beginning to low-intermediate text (pp. 26-29).

The presentation of the future time expressions themselves also shows incredible diversity. For example, Folse (2012) and Celce-Murica & Sokolik (2007) present only BGT and WILL; Lee et al. (2011) includes BGT, WILL, and the future progressive; Murphy and Smalzer (2011) include present progressive, simple present, BGT, and WILL; and Azar and Hagen. (2009) present a more extensive listing of future time markers with BGT, WILL, time clauses, present progressive, simple present, future progressive, future perfect, and future perfect progressive. Overall, the texts present the following expressions in their chapters introducing future time: WILL, BGT, time clauses, If- clauses, simple present, present progressive, may and might, about to, future progressive, and future perfect along with future perfect progressive. What the texts do present uniformly is to include BGT and WILL in their presentation of future time. This seems to agree with the notion of these two renditions being the most common among all future time expressions.

Ordering of WILL and BGT in Textbooks

The order in which BGT and WILL is presented is not at all uniform. Two texts introduce BGT and WILL together in the same lesson (Azar & Hagen, 2009/2011;Leet et al., 2011) . One text presents WILL initially (Ebaum, 2010). Another three texts introduce BGT as the primary expression (Broukal, 2010; Folse, 2012; Celce-Murcia & Sokolik, 2007). Reppen (2012) introduces BGT in the first lesson along with the present progressive while Brass (2012) follows the same pattern but adds simple present tense. The last text (Murphy & Smalzer, 2011) introduces the present progressive and simple present before introducing BGT and WILL (sequentially).

Explanations for WILL and BGT in Textbooks

Explanations for the usage of BGT and WILL also appear to be just as diverse and at times nebulous. What all the textbooks agree on are these three statements: (1) BGT is essentially used when expressing a *prior plan* or some form of intentionality, for example, *I'm going to paint my bedroom tomorrow*; (2) WILL expresses an immediate, or momentary, decision as in *The phone's ringing. I'll get it,* and never for a previously made plan, e.g. **We'll move to a different house next week*; and (3) both BGT and WILL may be used for making predictions, such as *I think it's going to rain today/I think it'll rain today*. Other explanations on the use of WILL involve making an offer, offering help, and making a promise. One could argue that these explanations can be placed into the category of "momentary decision" since making an offer and making a promise usually occur in the moment it is needed - no prior plan was made. However, this does not seem to be true at all times. The following statements clearly make a promise yet use the BGT construction: *I promise I'm going to do better next time* and *Don't worry if this hard to understand. I'm going to help you.* The trouble lies in the fact that the

average native speaker may say that the above examples sound acceptable. Yet, if they do sound acceptable, language instructors will have a potentially difficult time explaining to their students why these examples are correct when their grammar textbook says WILL is the only correct choice.

Where explanations on the differences between BGT and WILL become apparently nebulous at first is the use of hedging words in their explanation. For example, Azar and Hagen (2009/2012), write that BGT *commonly* and WILL *typically* express predictions about the future. Additionally, Folse (2009) in his *Keys to Teaching Grammar to English Language Learners* (meant for instructors) uses hedging remarks on BGT and WILL in the following statements: "We *particularly* use this expression [BGT] to talk about future actions or events that we have already planned (*Sometimes* the meanings of be going to and will overlap, but *sometimes* they do not…" (p. 140, *emphasis added*), and "We *especially* use will to talk about future actions that we did not have a prior plan to do" (p. 141). If BGT is particularly used to express a prior plan and WILL is especially used to express the opposite, this leaves open the possibility that there are clear exceptions to these rules, and that the use of both BGT and WILL is, therefore, not very clear. One such example is the explanation from Lee et al. (2011) that WILL expresses a momentary decision about a future action: *I think I'll stay home today*. Compare this statement to the following example: *I think I'm going to stay home today*. The latter example seems equally as correct usage as the first example.

Reppen (2012) has mentioned that adverbs are common with WILL to express certainty, such as *certainly, definitely, surely, likely, probably,* and *possibly* as in *Class materials will likely be online.* However, the textbook does not address the fact that BGT seems equally possible here: *I'm probably going to drive home tonight; She's possibly going to be late;* and *They're*

definitely going to help out. In Reppen's defense, her only explanation is that adverbs are *common* with WILL to express certainty.

What is notable about both *Grammar Beyond* texts (Reppen, 2012; Blass, Iannuzzi Savage, & Reppen, 2012) are the "Data from the Real World" notes scattered throughout the grammar sections containing relevant information about actual usage. The following statement is from the introduction of the *Grammar and Beyond* textbooks:

> The grammar presented in this series is informed by years of research on the grammar of written and spoken North American English as it is used in college lectures, textbooks, academic essays, high school classrooms, and conversations between instructors and students. This research, and the analysis of over one billion words of authentic written and spoken language data known as the Cambridge International Corpus, has enabled the authors to use: present grammar rules that accurately represent how North American English is actually spoken and written (Blass et al., 2012).

Therefore, this section previously discussed on adverbs with WILL for certainty claims that the word *probably* is most often used in conversation than in writing (Reppen, 2012). This type of information is possible through analyzing corpora of language data through frequency counting using a scientific methodology known as corpus linguistics.

How can corpus linguistics help?

Corpus linguistics

According to Gray and Biber (2011), corpus linguistics (CL) is "a methodology for linguistic analysis that focuses on describing linguistic variation in large collections of authentic

texts (the corpus), using automatic and interactive computer programs to aid in analysis" (p. 139). Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1994/1996) and Biber and Conrad (2001) describe the essential characteristics of a corpus-based approach to language in four ways:

1. The approach is empirical and based on actual, observed patterns of use in naturally occurring language.
2. The foundation of the analysis is based on a collection of natural texts which are representative of the target domain.
3. It makes extensive use of computers in analyzing the corpus through both automatic and interactive tools
4. The analysis is both qualitative and quantitative in nature.

The goal of corpus linguistics is to identify patterns of variation that are generalizable across different contexts of language use (Gray & Biber, 2011). It also seeks to describe the functions and frequency distribution of those linguistic features and patterns.

Advantages of corpus linguistics

Corpus-based approaches to language carry with them distinct strengths which give them notable advantages over other forms of language research. Three major advantages are the fact that (1) they provide a large empirical database of natural discourse, that is the corpus, rather than intuitions and perceptions, (2) they enable analyses of a scope not feasible otherwise, namely the investigation of different language patterns and use across registers (Biber et al., 1994) (register refers to "varieties of language use that are distinguishable based on situational characteristics such as purpose, mode, setting, author/speaker, reader and so on" (Gray and Biber, 2001, p. 140); and (3) corpus-based studies rely on a number of computer based language tools which should yield the same conclusions about a particular linguistic feature, hence

heightening reliability and allowing the researcher to focus attention on interpreting linguistic data (Gray & Biber, 2001).

Studies using corpus linguistics

The strengths of CL have been demonstrated and documented in the last couple of decades (see Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1994; Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1996; Conrad, 1999; Conrad, 2000; Biber & Conrad, 2001; Biber & Reppen, 2002). Three examples of these studies in CL are reviewed and presented in Table 2.3.

Table 2.4 Research Results for Corpus Linguistic Studies

Study	Findings
Biber & Conrad, 2001	Analyzed a 20 million word corpus for the most commonly used English verbs. Results: the 12 most common verbs are *say, get, go know, think, see, make, come, take, want, give,* and *mean.*
Biber & Reppen, 2002	Compared the frequency of the simple present tense and the present progressive tense in English conversation. Results: simple present tense occurred more than 20 times as much as present progressive in conversation.
Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1996	Investigated that- and to- clauses for collocations and co-occurrences. Results: that- clauses are more common in conversation than in academic prose; to-clauses appear equally in both. Some verbs as hope, decide, and wish control both clauses; the verbs imagine, mention, suggest, conclude, guess, and argue control only that-clauses; the verbs begin, start, like, love, try, and want control only to-clauses.

Common lexical verbs across registers

A study conducted by Biber and Conrad (2001) investigated which lexical verbs were most common across all registers. The analysis was based on approximately 20 million words from four registers: conversation, fiction, newspaper language, and academic prose. According

to the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al., 1999), there are approximately 400 different verbs that occur over 20 times per million words. This means that for every set of million words that are sampled from the Longman corpus, nearly 400 verbs appear at least 20 times. This may include common verbs, such as *pull, throw, choose,* and *fall.*

Interestingly, Biber and Conrad revealed that there are 63 verbs that occur more than 500 times per million words in a register, and only 12 verbs that appear more than 1,000 times per million words (Biber & Conrad, 2001). What are these 12 verbs? Clearly, for only 12 verbs in English to appear more than 1,000 times per million words, these words must be extremely important for L2 learners to learn and master. The 12 most common verbs are *say, get, go, know, think, see, make, come, take, want, give,* and *mean* (Biber & Conrad, 2001). It appears from the analysis that these 12 verbs accounted for almost 45% of the occurrences in conversation, whereas they only accounted for 11% of verbs in academic prose. Therefore, these verbs are more common in conversation than in any other register.

Given the empirical data discovered from this corpus-based study, Biber and Conrad (2001) suggested that these verbs be introduced early on in the ESL/EFL classroom. Learners would then have the opportunity to employ these words in conversation and have a multitude of opportunities to hear them based on the frequency data. These results are also useful for materials developers, especially of grammar texts, to give priority to the 12 most common verbs instead of other simple verbs which do not occur as often, such as *eat, sleep, play,* etc.

Grammar topics, intuition, and corpus linguistics

Another notable study reveals the inadequacy of basing the order of grammar topics solely on intuition. Biber and Reppen (2002) have reported a study based on the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English* (Biber et al., 1999). For some time, it was widely held

that progressive aspect (i.e. tense) was the "unmarked choice in conversation" (Biber and Reppen, 2002, p. 203). Grammar texts before the last decade or so gave priority to this grammatical construction and viewed it as "one of the fundamental building blocks of English grammar" (Biber and Reppen). Some texts would present the progressive before the simple aspect.

After a corpus-based study comparing the frequency of both the progressive and simple aspect across registers, Biber and Reppen have concluded that this long held notion is incorrect. It is true that, generally speaking, the progressive is much more common in conversation than in academic prose and other registers (e.g. fiction and news). However, this does not mean that progressive is the unmarked choice in conversation at all. In fact, simple-aspect verb phrases occur more than 20 times as common as progressive in conversation.

Clearly, then, the simple aspect should be given the priority in the classroom and in textbooks. The belief, based on intuition, has been discredited by empirical data through corpus-based research. Therefore, this makes an even stronger case for the usage of findings from corpus-based research in materials development and classroom instruction.

Investigating grammatical issues in corpus linguistics

Corpus-based research can also address grammatical issues. This stems from the fact that corpus-linguistics is both quantitative *and* qualitative. Not only is the frequency of certain grammatical features and vocabulary a primary method in acquiring data, so is analyzing the findings to uncover salient collocations and co-occurrences (see Cacoullos and Walker, 2009 for an excellent example of this type of corpus analysis).

Biber, Conrad, and Reppen (1996) present an example of CL addressing grammatical issues by describing certain aspects of the grammar of complement clauses. The two most

common types of complement clauses are *that*-clauses and *to*-clauses. In fact, there are instances where these two clauses share similar meanings, such as *I hope that I can go* and *I hope to go*. However, from studying the corpus for associations across registers, Biber, Conrad, and Reppen have found that the actual use of these two structures is very different. First, *that*-clauses are much more common in conversation than in academic prose. Second, *to*-clauses are nearly equally used in both registers.

Taking it another step further in analyzing the generated frequency data, the difference in overall distribution could be due to differing lexical associations. Biber and Reppen (1996) found that it appears while some verbs control both *that* and *to*-clauses, most verbs control only one or the other. Examples of verbs that control both types of clauses are *hope, decide,* and *wish*. The verbs *imagine, mention, suggest, conclude, guess,* and *argue* can control a *that*-clause but not a *to*-clause. The verbs *begin, start, like, love, try,* and *want* can control a *to*-clause but not the former.

In conclusion, the empirical power and scope that corpus linguistics can bring to the analysis of language, from the frequency of vocabulary to grammatical peculiarities, has been clearly demonstrated. For the purposes of the current study, corpus linguistics was used to reveal frequency of vocabulary items across registers to discover how native speakers actually render future time utterances in conversation.

What is spoken grammar?

Another notable outcome of what has been called the 'corpus revolution' (Leech, 2000) is the notion of differentiating between written and spoken grammar. Spoken grammar is "the manifestation of systematic grammatical phenomena in spoken discourse that arise from the circumstances in which speech (i.e. conversation) is characteristically produced" (Cullen and

Kuo, 2007, p. 363). For the first time, corpus linguistics offered linguists the opportunity to study the grammatical characteristics of spoken discourse on a broader and more profound scale. People had begun the collection of spoken data as early as the 60's, such as the Brown Corpus. There have been a variety of British corpora created (e.g. Lond-Lund Corpus, British National Corpus, and Cambridge & Nottingham Corpus of Discourse in English) whereas there seems to be have been relatively little corpora created in the United States (Leech, 2000). This is not to say that there exist no large-scale corpora of American English. In fact, one of the most seemingly renowned and used corpora of English is the Longman Spoken and Written English (LSWE) corpus of 40 million words.

One of the approaches to the notion of spoken grammar has been highlighted in the work Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Fineman (1999). Biber et al. (1999) have used the LSWE to examine a wide range of grammatical features that are more frequent in conversation than in the three written registers: fiction, news, and academic (as cited in Leech, 2000). These features can further be grouped into categories on the basis of functional characteristics of conversation (Leech, 2000). The most important functional categories are that conversational grammar (1) reflects a shared context, (2) avoids elaboration or specification of reference, (3) is interactive grammar, (4) highlights affective content: personal feelings and attitudes, (5) has a restricted and repetitive lexicogrammatical repertoire, and (6) is adapted to the needs of real-time processing (Leech, 2000).

Conversation and sitcom dialogue

Quaglio (2006, 2008) conducted a study in which he compared the language of the U.S. sitcom *Friends* with naturally occurring conversations. He points out that since spoken corpora

are not as readily available as written corpora he wanted to investigate the language of television discourse as a way to bring natural English conversation into the ESL classroom.

Quaglio (2008) created a corpus from *Friends* transcripts of all nine seasons of the show from 1994-2003 that includes 600,000 words. The transcripts were taken from a fan website called www.crazyforfriends.com. He selected three transcripts of three episodes from each season and compared them against the actual show. Quaglio determined that they were fairly accurate and detailed. Quaglio used a conversation subcorpus of the *Longman Grammar Corpus* containing approximately 590,000 words in order to more easily compare it to the *Friends* corpus. This subcorpus was composed of the four most common speech types: casual conversation, task related/ service encounters/casual, phone/casual, and work-related only conversations.

Quaglio then annotated the two corpora for parts of speech and various grammatical features using an automated grammatical tagger developed by Biber. Everything was done automatically using a concordance software program called MonoConc Pro 2.2 and then manually checked for accuracy and disambiguation purposes.

Quaglio (2008) combined multidimensional (MD) methodology and a "frequency based analysis of 166 linguistic features with the typical characteristics of naturally-occurring conversation" (p. 195). MD was developed as a quantitative corpus based methodology to study the coordinated patterns of use among a full range of linguistic features (Biber & Reppen, 2002). He compared *Friends* to natural conversation using one of the programs in MD. Basically, in the author's own words, "this program counts the grammatical tags for each of the texts and outputs scores on each of Biber's dimensions of register variation by comparing these texts to those"

which were used in an earlier study by Biber in 1988 (as cited in Quaglio, 2008, p. 197). The higher the score, the more it can be concluded to have features of conversation.

Friends scored a 34.4 on Dimension 1, which is very similar to conversation (35.3) indicating a high degree of involvement. Quaglio (2006) concluded that **"**the results of the MD analysis indicated that *Friends* shares the core linguistic characteristics of face-to-face conversation, thus constituting fairly accurate representation of natural conversation for ESL purposes" (p. 198).

Corpus linguistic studies on future time expressions.

The literature contains several corpus-based studies on futurity in English. Some of the research focused on the different usages of BGT and WILL directly using quantitative analysis through frequency counting while others performed a more qualitative study. Others did a frequency overview of the different expressions of future renditions in English across regional varieties. Those studies and their relevant findings will be presented (see Table 2.4).

Table 2.5 Research Results for Corpus Linguistic Studies on Futurity

Study	**Findings**
McCarthy & Carter, 1995	Compared conventional descriptions of WILL and BGT against a corpus of spoken English. Results: the situation is more complex than conventional descriptions and the choice between BGT and WILL seem to depend more on interpersonal stance.
Berglund, 1997	Compared the frequency of future expressions across three regional varieties of English: British, American, and Indian. Results: WILL is the most frequent expression of future in American English across all types of registers.
Berglund, 1999	Compared the frequency of future expressions in spoken British English. Results: the contraction *'ll* collocated frequently with personal pronouns;

Study	Findings
	both *'ll* and the contraction of BGT (*gonna*) emerges the most in spontaneous conversation; WILL occurs most in formal spoken language.
Szmrecsanyi, 2003	Investigated the relationship between future marker distributions and their syntactic environment. Results: negation, a syntactically dependent and independent environment and sentence length all affect the distribution of future markers.
Cacoullos & Walker, 2009	Analyzed a corpus of spoken Canadian English to investigate the quantitative patterning of future forms in varying linguistic contexts. Results: temporal distance and certainty does not give an accurate or complete picture of the choice between future forms.

McCarthy & Carter, 1995

McCarthy and Carter (1995) conducted a study using a corpus collected at the University of Nottingham. The corpus was constructed for the purpose of studying spoken grammar, which targeted conversational language. The authors conceded that the corpus was not intended to be a large scale collection of data, like that of the *Longman* corpus. However, they argue that any data totaling 100,000 words or less across a range of genres and speakers can reveal significant patterns. In fact, other studies have reported that even samples of 1,000 words across different registers can result in reliable counts of common grammatical features (Biber, 1993; Conrad, 1999).

Within their research, McCarthy and Carter (1995) tested the "conventional descriptions" WILL and BGT against their data of real conversational English. Briefly, the typical textbook explanation on using BGT is the expression of intention (*I am going to study this weekend*) while

WILL is used for momentary decisions (*I'll help you with that*). However, the authors concluded that "the picture is more complex, and the choice often seems to rest more on interpersonal stance…" (McCarthy and Carter, 1995, p. 213). One example from their corpus of spoken English demonstrates this problem:

> [In a restaurant]
>
> **A:** [to her friend] I'm gonna have the deep fried mushrooms, you like mushrooms don't you?
>
> [A couple of minutes later]
>
> **A:** [to the waiter] I'll have the deep-fried mushrooms with erm an old time burger, can I have cheese on it? (p. 213)

The authors comment that Speaker A has already stated her "intention" to order the deep fried mushrooms and, therefore, explaining her use of WILL as a momentary decision seems misleading. "The most useful line to follow would seem to be to look at *be going to* as the verb of 'personal engagement' on behalf of the speaker, whilst *will* is a more neutral, detached verb (more suitable when addressing a waiter)" (McCarthy & Carter, 1995, p. 213).

Although McCarthy and Carter were not concerned with the frequency of future expressions, their research represents an example of how useful using a corpus on spoken English can be in terms of analyzing the language. They conclude that the real spoken data pushes us away from conventional beliefs about grammar and into more empirically based conclusions.

Berglund, 1997

Berglund (1997) conducted "to provide a general, quantitative picture of how some expressions of future are used in three regional varieties of Present-day English, British, American, and Indian English." The author used three corpora of *written* English: *The Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen Corpus of Present-Day British English* (LOB), *The Standard Corpus of Present-Day American English* (Brown), and *The Kolhapur Corpus of Indian English* (Kolhapur). The author also used additional data from *The London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English* (LLC). Five separate expressions were analyzed: *will*+infinitive (inf.)., *'ll*+inf., *shall*+inf., *BE(pres)going to*+inf. (BGT) and *gonna*+inf. "Comparisons were made between the corpora as wholes, between different text types within and between the corpora, and also between some of the text types combined into larger unite" which the author labels as *hypercategories* (Berglund, 1997, p. 8). These hypercategories are informative prose (e.g. press texts and scientific writings) and imaginative prose (e.g. love stories and science fiction).

The results of the analysis showed that considerable variation exists among the results and irregularity across and within both categories and corpora. Since the native speakers of North American English are in the scope of this study, the particular results from the British and Indian corpora will not be commented on. The results of the American corpus indicated that *will* is the most frequent expression of future used in the informative categories rather than the imaginative one. *BGT* and the contracted form *'ll* are much more frequent in the informative categories. *Shall* is very infrequent and is most used in the *Miscellaneous* and *Religion* categories of prose.

Berglund concludes that the three written corpora display "fairly similar patterns as the distribution of the studied expression is concerned" (Berglund, 1997, p. 14). The Indian corpus

was the most dissimilar as a whole from the British and American corpora. The latter two showed many similarities as a whole. However, the similarities outweighed the dissimilarities. Overall, *Will* is the most frequent expression used throughout all three while *BGT* is 'altogether infrequent.'

It is important to point out that Berglund conducted her study using *written* corpora. Therefore, it may be concluded, based on her empirical findings, that WILL is the most common rendition of future time across written registers. Yet a study on *spoken* registers remains open for investigation. Thus, the aim of this study is to see how native speakers render future time in spoken conversation.

Berglund, 1999

Berglund (1999) followed up on her 1997 study two years later when the advent of new resources became available to corpus linguists (Berglund, 1999). In this study, Berglund aimed to analyze not only British written corpora but spoken data as well. Because of relevance, only the spoken data and the results of that analysis will be mentioned here. The spoken corpora consisted of the London-Lund Corpus of Spoken English (LLC) of approximately 500,000 words and the spoken component of the British National Corpus Sampler (Sampler) containing one million words. The LLC is composed of a number of different text types, such as conversations, radio discussions, commentary, and spontaneous or prepared oration. The Sampler contains equally proportional data from context-governed material and demographically sampled data which was collected from across the UK. She divided the Sampler corpus between these two categories: the context-governed component (CG) and the demographically sampled component (DS). The DS in the Sampler consist of spontaneous conversations between demographically

selected respondents and people they talk to, while the CG consist of recording from ‘more formal encounters’ (Berglund, 1999, p. 27).

Burglund chose the same five expressions of future time used from her previous study in 1997. The five expressions were *will*+inf., *‘ll*+inf., *shall*+inf., *BE(pres)going to*+inf. (BGT) and *gonna*+inf. She performed a frequency overview of the five expressions using the LLC and Sampler corpora. What she found was considerable variation between the three spoken corpora. The proportion *gonna* was considerably higher in the two Sampler components compared to almost no existence in the LLC. The combined proportion of *gonna+going to* was just over 20% compared to 26% and 24% in the Sampler components. The combined proportions of *will* and *‘ll* are equal across all the spoken corpora at 71% - 72%.

Berglund (1999) also analyzed the corpora for collocations, personal pronouns, and clustering. She found that the five expressions are similar in that they often collocate with personal pronouns and the infinitival *be* (Berglund, 1999). *Will* is used less with personal pronouns, especially the pronoun *it*, while *‘ll* collocates with personal pronouns the most (over 90% of all cases). An absolute relationship between frequency of an expression and the number of clusters where it occurs was not apparent (Berglund, 1999). The only interest in clustering to note was the *will* and *going to* cluster with *be* yet only *will* is found with *be able*.

Berglund (1999) also discussed the relationship of the future expression across genres. What she found was that *gonna* emerges primarily in spontaneous conversation, where *‘ll* also appears to be frequent, and *will* occurs more in the formal spoken component.

Szmrecsanyi, 2003

Szmrecsanyi (2003) conducted a quantitative frequency based study of British and American English. His research was an attempt “fill in the gap” that existed in the literature by

systematically investigating whether, and to what extent, there are correlations between future marker distributions and their syntactic environment in spoken discourse. The main corpora that he used in regard to American English were the Santa Barbara Corpus of Spoken American English (CSAE) and the Corpus of Spoken Professional American English (CSPAE). The CSAE contains fourteen conversations with fifty-one speakers with approximately 61,000 words. At the time of this study, the CSAE was the only major corpus of American English conversation accessible to the wider research community (Szmrecsanyi, 2003). The CSPAE contains more formal language among professionals speaking on academics and politics with roughly 2 million words.

Szmrecsanyi's (2003) research demonstrated that prior frequency studies on the future expression were consistent with his own findings, particularly that BGT is clearly more frequent in informal discourse than in formal discourse. He also found that the contracted form of BGT, *gonna*, was by far the most frequent future marker in the CSAE and outnumbered the full *going to* by a ratio of 7:1. The frequency ratio between WILL and BGT were practically 50:50 in the CSAE (informal conversation), while WILL was more than two times as frequent in the CSPAE (formal conversation).

Szmrecsanyi investigated the effects of three linguistic environments on the use of BGT and WILL: (1) negation (using *not*), (2) a syntactically dependent and independent environment (where the future marker is part of the main or dependent clause), and (3) sentence length. What he concluded was that all of the above conditions impacted the distribution of future markers. From (1) he found that BGT is the preferred expression of negation in the future while *won't* is less common; *'ll not* is altogether non-existent in the American corpora; in (2) the data revealed that both variants of BGT (contracted and non-contracted) are more frequent in dependent

environments then independent ones while the opposite holds true for WILL; and from (3) it was systematically evident that sentences containing BGT were longer than sentences containing WILL.

Szmrecsanyi (2003) concluded that his study would seem to suggest that "the longer, the 'more subordinated,' and the more 'syntactically complex' any given syntactic environment is, the more speakers tend to use BE GOING TO instead of WILL/SHALL" (p. 23).

Cacoullos and Walker, 2009

Cacoullos and Walker (2009) conducted a more recent study by analyzing a corpus of spoken Canadian English. The purpose of this work was to "empirically test the claims made in the literature on the syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discourse factors constraining the choice of [future] forms" (p. 322). The authors sought to know the quantitative patterning of forms in varying linguistic contexts. They contend that collocations best answer the question of why speakers choose the future forms they do.

The authors used a variationist *method* which "seeks to discover the patterns of usage in the relative frequency of co-occurrence of linguistic forms and elements of the linguistic context" (p. 327). In this method, researchers identify similar discourse functions of different constructions, or variants. The authors fulfilled this by "exhaustively extracting each instance of the function in discourse and applying quantitative techniques to determine the influences of contextual factors on the choice of form." The data used were recordings of sociolinguistic interviews with seventy-four native speakers of English in Canada which composed a corpus of 340 hours of recorded speech with almost three million words of transcription. The authors defined the variable context to "events or states occurring after speech time" (p. 327) which

therefore excluded certain ‘future’ forms which are used for functions other than referring to the future time, such as generic situations (e.g.*If your pastry’s good, it’ll be good*), habitual (e.g. *He’ll go out about ten-o-clock for a wlittle walk over there*), and modal uses (e.g. *I will not have a kitchen with a small counter*) (p. 327).

The distribution of variant of future temporal reference was as follows: *going to* (42%), *will* (42%), present progressive (13%), simple present (3%) of 3,337 tokens (p. 328). The authors then proceeded to analyze the data in a multitude of ways. They began by coding each token for a series of factors which came from the hypotheses and findings in the literature. This included temporal proximity, lexical verb, type of subject and grammatical /discourse context. Temporal proximity yielded unhelpful results since 70% of the dataset were determined not to be within the immediate time (and operationalizing what temporal proximity “is” was a greater challenge). Proximity seems to be related to the speakers ‘perception’ rather than an objective measurement (which is almost impossible to measure).

The authors focused much of their analysis on *will* and *be going to* and found that, overall, “the constructions appear to be functionally equivalent” (p. 337). Temporal proximity was shown not to be a factor when it comes to choosing either. *Will* was highly used with certain collocations and lexical verbs, such as *I’ll*. *Be going to* seemed to be strongly favored in interrogatives.

The authors concluded that *will* and *be going to* “are not distinguished by an overriding semantic difference along a single dimension of temporal distance, certainty, or interpersonal relations (i.e., willingness vs. plannedness)” but each has “particular but small niches” (p. 347). Collocations are responsible, at least in part, for the distribution of patterns. The most notable of these collocations are the “within a minute” tokens consisting of first-person singular will (*‘ll*)

that made up a greater proportion than average of their corresponding lexical type (p. 339). *I'll tell* tokens added up to more than half (58%) of all *tell* tokens. The other notable collocations in the study are *I'll pay* (53% of pay) and *I'll ask* (44% of ask). The results of this study point to the importance of the lexicon in grammatical variation. Explaining away the differences in meaning by 'temporal distance' or 'certainty' does not give an accurate, nor complete picture.

What is most notable about this study in terms of frequency is the equivalent distribution of BGT (42%) and WILL (42%) among the spoken data. This is consistent with results from previous studies (see Berglund, 1997/1999 &Szmrecsanyi, 2003).

The studies using corpus analysis that have been done on the future expressions in English shed some light on distributions of expressions and attempted to take into account patterns of usage. This study is a modest attempt to calculate the frequency of future English expressions to present a case for the how native speakers actually express future time in spoken English conversation.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The most common expression of the future in the English language has been the semi-modal *will* as in *We will go to the movies this* weekend. However, upon further examination, there exist a multitude of renditions that express a future aspect beyond the word *will.* Some of these other futuristic expressions include, but are not limited to, *be going to,* simple present tense, present progressive tense, and modals. As one may see, some of these possibilities, although labeled as a *present* tense, can have a future meaning, such as *We're going to the movies this weeken*d, which is an example of present progressive tense being used to describe an overt future event. Therefore, with so many choices and with little correlation between tense and time, a language learner may certainly have difficulties in choosing which expression to use when attempting to produce a future utterance.

This study investigated future expressions in spoken conversational English to answer the following research questions:

1. How do native speakers actually express future time in spoken conversational English?
2. Which future expressions are the most common in spoken conversational English?

To answer these questions, the researcher performed a corpus based analysis by using transcripts of the television sitcom

Design of the Study

The overall design of the study was not complicated. Transcripts of the television sitcom *Friends* were collected to create a corpus of 349,106 words. Each transcript was carefully read and analyzed for all occurrences of future expressions. The occurrences were color coded and

labeled in an Excel spreadsheet. These expressions were then counted to determine their frequency.

Pilot Study

Before the actual study began, the researcher conducted a pilot study in order to verify the accuracy of identifying and categorizing the future expressions that emerged from the transcripts of *Friends*. Two participants, both experienced ESL professionals, one of them was the researcher, examined two transcripts each from the sitcom *Friends*. The transcripts were found on a fan-based website called *Crazy for Friends* at http://www.livesinabox.com/friends/. One transcript was selected at random (season 1, episode 2). The other (season 2, episode 9) was chosen purposively because the title hinted at the possibility of many future renderings – *The One Where They're Gonna PARTY!* The pilot study served to establish inter-rater reliability and remove bias by any individual rater. Because the pilot study gauged the reliability of the researcher's accuracy at analyzing and collecting data, randomization was unnecessary in this step of the study. The two individuals worked independently of each other. The objective was to find and highlight each instance of future rendering in the dialogue.

After each rater completed analyzing both transcripts, they met to compare their findings. They found 65 instances of future renderings within 5,353 words with an inter-rater reliability of 99%. Therefore, the outcome of the pilot study confirmed the reliability of the researcher's analysis and collection process.

The Corpus for this Study

Whole intact transcripts of the television sitcom *Friends* were collected from the website http://www.livesinabox.com/friends/ in order to create a corpus. Using a corpus of transcripts from the sitcom *Friends* is based on the research findings from Quaglio and Biber (2006) and

Quaglio (2008). In brief, Quaglio compared the grammatical features of spoken conversation in English and the dialogue of the sitcom *Friends*. The results of Quaglio's study showed a striking similarity between *Friends* and face-to-face conversation.

Every odd-numbered episode (i.e. 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, etc.) was selected from each of the 10 seasons of *Friends* which aired from the years 1994-2004. By selecting every odd-numbered episode for inclusion into the *Friends* corpus, transcripts were chosen randomly. The total number of transcripts/episodes that were included into the *Friends* corpus was 117 of the 236 episodes that aired.

All content that was not part of the actual dialogue was removed. These non-dialogical items included the title of the episode, writer, date, name of the speakers (e.g., Monica), contextual information that provided the location or situation of the dialogue (e.g., Ross's apartment), and other markers that signaled the opening credits or commercial break. Once all of these items were removed, a word count was done using Microsoft Office's Word for each of the 117 transcripts. The researcher defined every piece of the sentence a word. For example, the sentence *Ross missed his sister's birthday party* contains six words.

After performing the word count for each of the 117 transcripts, each count was then added together. The number of words for each *Friends* transcript was around 2,500. The final episode of seasons 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 contained a little over 5,000 words. This is because the final episode in these seasons was split into two parts, and the transcripts combined both parts of the final episode into one transcript. In the end, the *Friends* corpus consisted of 349,106 words.

Analysis

Each of the 117 transcripts from all 10 seasons of *Friends* were copied from the website http://www.livesinabox.com/friends/ and pasted into a Word document. Within the Word document, each transcript was read thoroughly from beginning to end and each future expression that emerged in the dialogues was individually color coded in Word. The future forms and their respective color coding are as follows: *'ll*/yellow, *will* and *won't*/green, *be going to*/purple, *gonna* and *not gonna*/ aqua, present progressive/dark purple, simple present/red, modals/blue, and *be about to*/gray (see Figure 3.1 for an example).

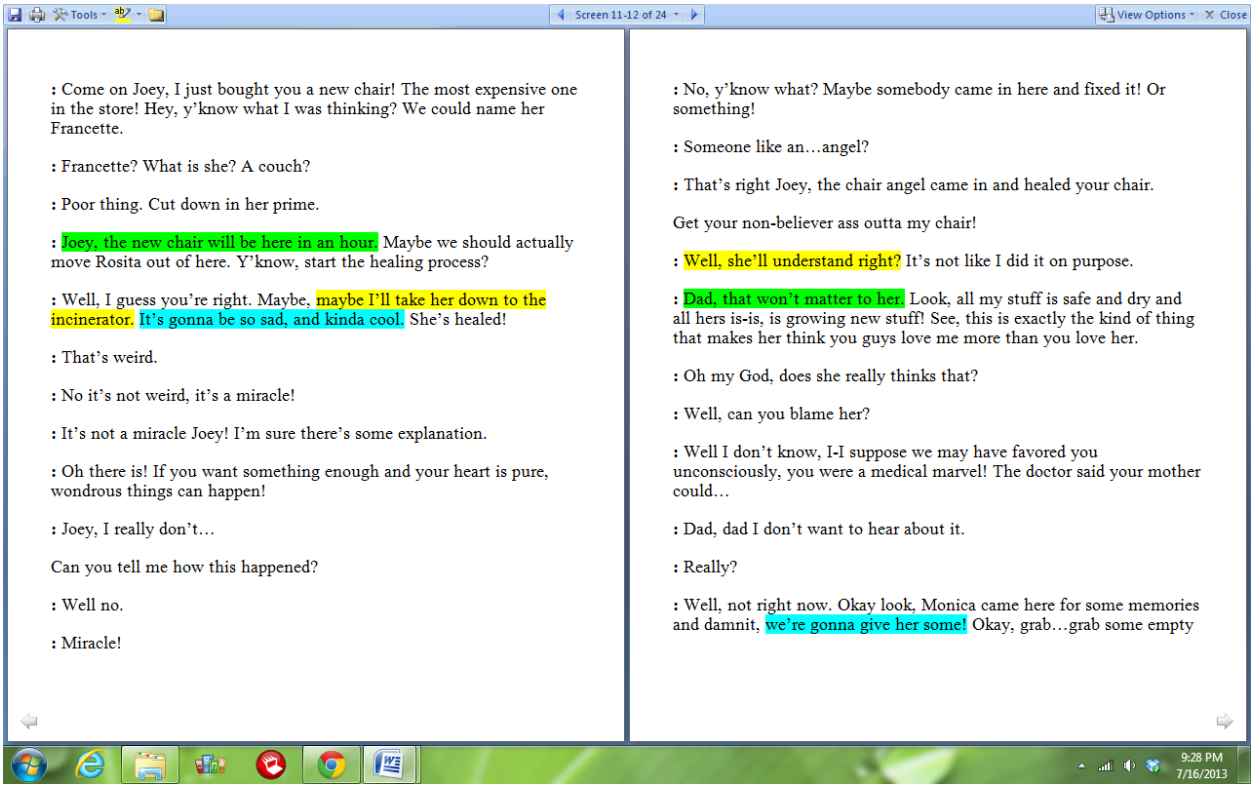
The color coded future expressions that emerged in the transcripts were then placed into categories in an Excel document. Each and every expression had its own column and counting starting from the second row and continuing down (e.g., 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.). Each occurrence was also carefully labeled by the number of season followed by a decimal point and then the episode number. For example, an occurrence from episode five of season three was marked as 3.5. The future expressions that emerged include: *'ll*, *will*, *won't*, be *going to*, *gonna*, *not gonna*, present progressive, simple present, modals and *be about to*.

During the counting process in Excel, the expressions were further marked depending on certain contextual conditions. First of all, if the expression was used in a question, the label would be accompanied by the letter "q" to signify *question* (e.g. 3.5q). Next, if the expression was used in the negative, the abbreviation "neg" would be placed along with the count (e.g. 3.5 neg). Third, with every expression of the contracted form *'ll*, the subject, the verb, and part of the predicate was recorded, such as 6.3 *it'll be like college*. Finally, each and every emergence of modal use in the future time was marked along with the labeled count.

Once all the items had been identified and categorized, the number of occurrences within each group was calculated to determine frequency. This was done in Excel by recording the number of rows that each future expression contained. Since each row in Excel was numbered, the counting process was done quite easily (see Figure 3.2 for an example). Once the number of all the rows of a future expression was recorded, the numbers were then added together to make the total number of future occurrences in the corpus.

The final step was to determine the frequency of each occurrence. Each number of occurrences for each individual future expression was divided by the total number of future occurrences to generate a percentage. After a percentage for each occurrence was generated and recorded, the different forms of *will* and *be going to* were then added together to generate a total percentage of each expression at large. This was done in order to determine which expressions occur the most often in spoken English conversation.

Figure 3.1Examples of color-coded transcripts in Word



: Come on Joey, I just bought you a new chair! The most expensive one in the store! Hey, y'know what I was thinking? We could name her Francette.

: Francette? What is she? A couch?

: Poor thing. Cut down in her prime.

: Joey, the new chair will be here in an hour. Maybe we should actually move Rosita out of here. Y'know, start the healing process?

: Well, I guess you're right. Maybe, maybe I'll take her down to the incinerator. It's gonna be so sad, and kinda cool. She's healed!

: That's weird.

: No it's not weird, it's a miracle!

: It's not a miracle Joey! I'm sure there's some explanation.

: Oh there is! If you want something enough and your heart is pure, wondrous things can happen!

: Joey, I really don't…

Can you tell me how this happened?

: Well no.

: Miracle!

: No, y'know what? Maybe somebody came in here and fixed it! Or something!

: Someone like an…angel?

: That's right Joey, the chair angel came in and healed your chair.

Get your non-believer ass outta my chair!

: Well, she'll understand right? It's not like I did it on purpose.

: Dad, that won't matter to her. Look, all my stuff is safe and dry and all hers is-is, is growing new stuff! See, this is exactly the kind of thing that makes her think you guys love me more than you love her.

: Oh my God, does she really thinks that?

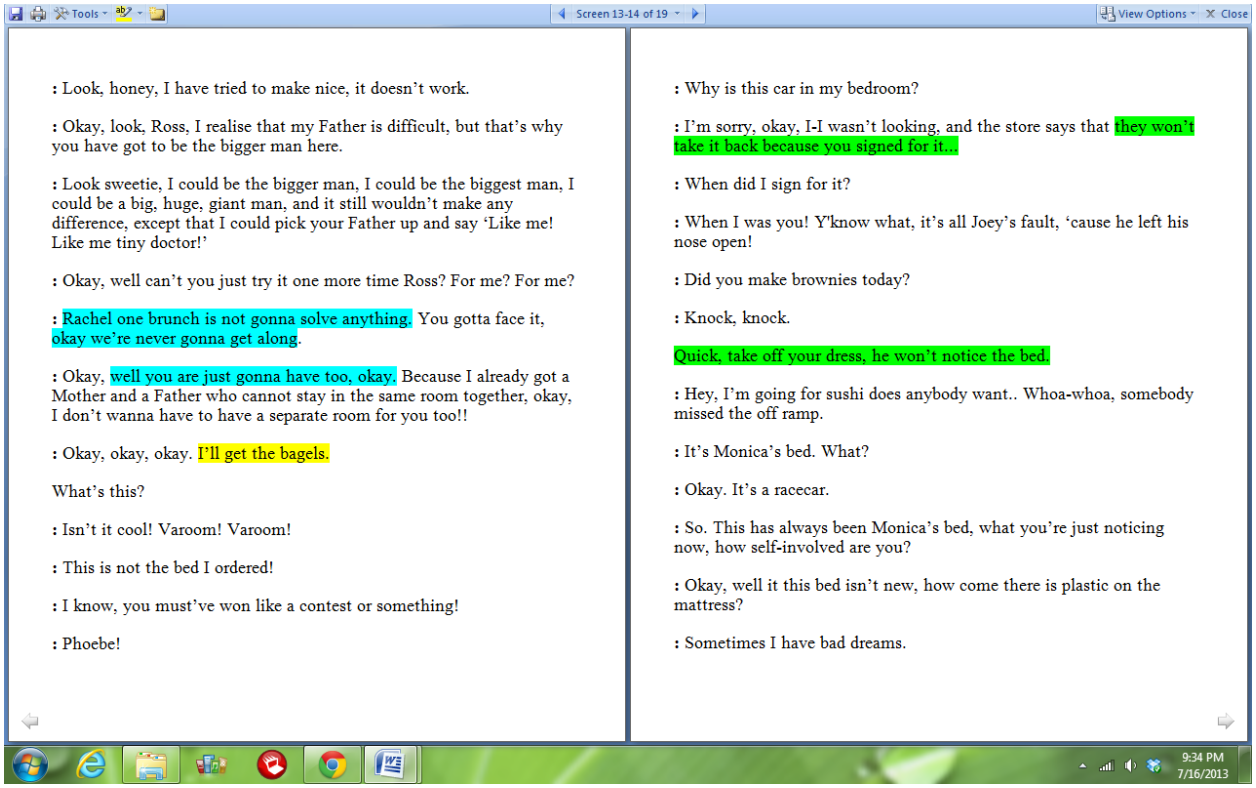
: Well, can you blame her?

: Well I don't know, I-I suppose we may have favored you unconsciously, you were a medical marvel! The doctor said your mother could…

: Dad, dad I don't want to hear about it.

: Really?

: Well, not right now. Okay look, Monica came here for some memories and damnit, we're gonna give her some! Okay, grab…grab some empty



: Look, honey, I have tried to make nice, it doesn't work.

: Okay, look, Ross, I realise that my Father is difficult, but that's why you have got to be the bigger man here.

: Look sweetie, I could be the bigger man, I could be the biggest man, I could be a big, huge, giant man, and it still wouldn't make any difference, except that I could pick your Father up and say 'Like me! Like me tiny doctor!'

: Okay, well can't you just try it one more time Ross? For me? For me?

: Rachel one brunch is not gonna solve anything. You gotta face it, okay we're never gonna get along.

: Okay, well you are just gonna have too, okay. Because I already got a Mother and a Father who cannot stay in the same room together, okay, I don't wanna have to have a separate room for you too!!

: Okay, okay, okay. I'll get the bagels.

What's this?

: Isn't it cool! Varoom! Varoom!

: This is not the bed I ordered!

: I know, you must've won like a contest or something!

: Phoebe!

: Why is this car in my bedroom?

: I'm sorry, okay, I-I wasn't looking, and the store says that they won't take it back because you signed for it...

: When did I sign for it?

: When I was you! Y'know what, it's all Joey's fault, 'cause he left his nose open!

: Did you make brownies today?

: Knock, knock.

Quick, take off your dress, he won't notice the bed.

: Hey, I'm going for sushi does anybody want.. Whoa-whoa, somebody missed the off ramp.

: It's Monica's bed. What?

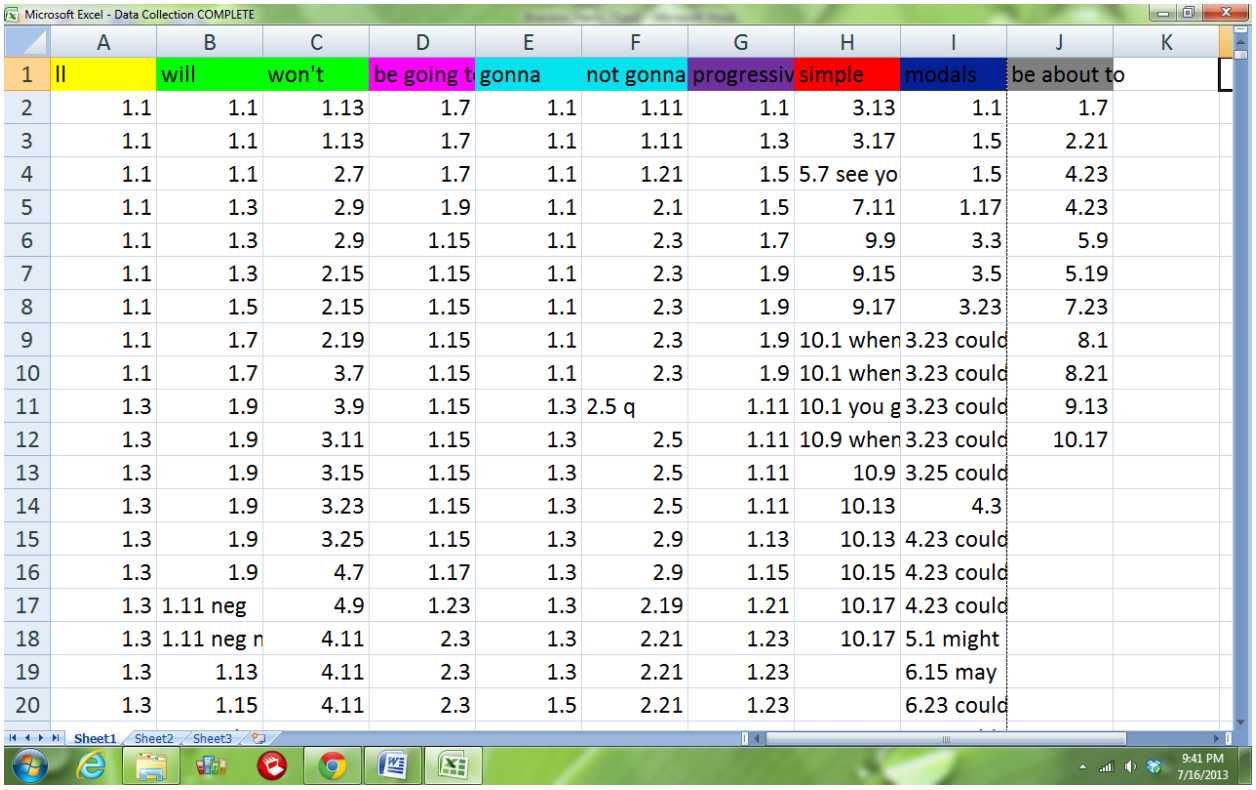
: Okay. It's a racecar.

: So. This has always been Monica's bed, what you're just noticing now, how self-involved are you?

: Okay, well it this bed isn't new, how come there is plastic on the mattress?

: Sometimes I have bad dreams.

Figure 3.2 Example of counting in Excel



	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
1	ll	will	won't	be going t	gonna	not gonna	progressiv	simple	modals	be about to	
2	1.1	1.1	1.13	1.7	1.1	1.11	1.1	3.13	1.1	1.7	
3	1.1	1.1	1.13	1.7	1.1	1.11	1.3	3.17	1.5	2.21	
4	1.1	1.1	2.7	1.7	1.1	1.21	1.5	5.7 see yo	1.5	4.23	
5	1.1	1.3	2.9	1.9	1.1	2.1	1.5	7.11	1.17	4.23	
6	1.1	1.3	2.9	1.15	1.1	2.3	1.7	9.9	3.3	5.9	
7	1.1	1.3	2.15	1.15	1.1	2.3	1.9	9.15	3.5	5.19	
8	1.1	1.5	2.15	1.15	1.1	2.3	1.9	9.17	3.23	7.23	
9	1.1	1.7	2.19	1.15	1.1	2.3	1.9	10.1 when	3.23 could	8.1	
10	1.1	1.7	3.7	1.15	1.1	2.3	1.9	10.1 when	3.23 could	8.21	
11	1.3	1.9	3.9	1.15	1.3	2.5 q	1.11	10.1 you g	3.23 could	9.13	
12	1.3	1.9	3.11	1.15	1.3	2.5	1.11	10.9 when	3.23 could	10.17	
13	1.3	1.9	3.15	1.15	1.3	2.5	1.11	10.9	3.25 could		
14	1.3	1.9	3.23	1.15	1.3	2.5	1.11	10.13	4.3		
15	1.3	1.9	3.25	1.15	1.3	2.9	1.13	10.13	4.23 could		
16	1.3	1.9	4.7	1.17	1.3	2.9	1.15	10.15	4.23 could		
17	1.3	1.11 neg	4.9	1.23	1.3	2.19	1.21	10.17	4.23 could		
18	1.3	1.11 neg n	4.11	2.3	1.3	2.21	1.23	10.17	5.1 might		
19	1.3	1.13	4.11	2.3	1.3	2.21	1.23		6.15 may		
20	1.3	1.15	4.11	2.3	1.5	2.21	1.23		6.23 could		

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

The most common expression of the future in the English language has been the semi-modal *will* as in *We will go to the movies this* weekend. However, upon further examination, there exist a multitude of renditions that express a future aspect beyond the word *will.* Some of these other futuristic expressions include, but are not limited to, *be going to,* simple present tense, present progressive tense, and modals. As one may see, some of these possibilities, although labeled as a *present* tense, can have a future meaning, such as *We're going to the movies this weekend*. Therefore, with so many choices and with little correlation between tense and time, a language learner may certainly have difficulties in choosing which expression to use when attempting to produce a future utterance.

This study investigated future expressions in spoken conversational English to answer the following research questions:

3. How do native speakers actually express future time in spoken conversational English?
4. Which future expressions are the most common in spoken conversational English?

To answer these questions, the researcher performed a corpus based analysis by using transcripts of the television sitcom *Friends* to locate and categorize each every future expression that emerged in the text.

Results

1. How do native speakers actually express future time in spoken conversational English?

In order to answer this question, a corpus of spoken conversational English was created by using selected transcripts from the television sitcom *Friends*. Each odd-numbered episode

was selected from all ten seasons. The total corpus size amounted to 349,106 words. Of this number of words, 3,552 (1.02% of the total) are future expressions. After all the future expressions from all the transcripts had been found and categorized, a frequency list of future renditions was determined. This list included the following expressions: *will, 'll, won't, be going to, gonna, not gonna, simple present, present progressive, modals,* and *be about to*.

The parameters for separately categorizing whole forms from contracted forms as in *will* and *'ll* was based on previous literature (Berglund, 1997/1999). In addition, distinguishing between these forms was believed to be helpful in analyzing the data for any potentially salient patterns or co-occurrences. The choice to distinguish between the negative forms followed a similar line of reasoning.

2. Which future expressions are the most common in spoken conversational English?

After finding and categorizing all of the future expressions as mentioned previously, a frequency list was created to show the occurrence of each future rendition and its percentage compared to the total number of future time occurrences (see table 4.1).

Table 4.1 Original Data Set

Future Expression	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
WILL (all categories)	1547	43.55
'll	1051	29.59
will	401	11.29
won't	95	2.67
BGT (all categories)	1623	45.7
be going to	249	7.01
be not going to	12	.33
gonna	1271	35.78
not gonna	91	2.56
Present Progressive	307	8.64
Simple Present	17	.48
Modals	47	1.27
Be about to	11	.31

Total Number of Occurrences = 3,552

Another frequency list was then created after editing out some of the occurrences of the modal *will*. The reasoning for determining this deletion was based on the fact that *will* can be used in a question of request, such as this example from episode 5 of season 1 - *Will you help me please?* The rendition does not have a future meaning, but expresses (1) a present request and (2) a response from the second party in regard to their *volition*.

The second data set, after editing for all occurrences of *will* following the parameters previously mentioned, amounted to a total of 3,508 future renditions and 357 occurrences of *will* compared to 401 in the original data collection (see table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Data Set 2 (WILL in a question removed)

Future Expression	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
WILL (all categories)	1503	42.84
'll	1051	29.96
will	357	10.18
won't	95	2.7
BGT (all categories)	1623	46.23
be going to	249	7.10
be not going to	12	.34
gonna	1271	36.23
not gonna	91	2.59
Present Progressive	307	8.75
Simple Present	17	.48
Modals	47	1.28
Be about to	11	.31

Total Number of Occurrences = 3,508

A third frequency list was created after a further deletion of some of the occurrences of *will, 'll*, and *won't*. The parameters for this edit were, first of all, based similarly to the second data set but restricted to those instance where *will*, and all of its forms, meant *volition*. The modal *will* has been described in the literature to express willingness on behalf of the speaker, as in this example from episode 9 of season 2 - *NO, I will not cave*. The researcher argues that this meaning does not signify a future time, but rather unwillingness to a certain action or circumstance.

Two excerpts from the *Friends* corpus exemplify this contrast between the *will* of volition and the *will* of future.

The first example is Excerpt A from episode 9 of seasons 3:

Excerpt A

Joey: Chandler, you have to start getting over her. All right, if you play, you get some fresh air, maybe *it'll take your mind off Janice*, and if you don't play, *everyone will be mad at you* 'cause *the teams won't be even*. Come on.

In Excerpt A, all three forms of *will* are captured in a future meaning. Not in one case can it be argued that an expression of *volition* is meant here. Even in the case of *everyone will be mad at you*, it is not reasonable to assert that willingness is meant here but rather *certainty* of the consequences of a particular action. In connection to this, all occurrences of *will* with the verb *be+past participle* were not edited from the list, but kept in the final count. The reasoning behind taking this step is that a speaker is *not* expressing their volition to a certain action or circumstance but making a general prediction, e.g. from episode 11 of season 10 - Oh believe me, Ross, I won't be telling anybody about this. Compare the previous example to *I won't tell anybody about this*. The meaning of the second one clearly demonstrates the will of the speaker versus the first example which predicts the action of the speaker excluding their volition.

An example of where *will* clearly expresses volition can be found in Excerpt B from episode 4 of season 11:

Excerpt B

Ross: Thank you, Dr. Phillips, but I'm having my lunch at this table, here in the middle. I'm having lunch right here, with my good friend Joey, *if he'll sit with me*.

Joey: *I will sit with you Dr. Geller*.

In except B, the two expressions of *will* here clearly indicate a willingness of the party being referred to. Joey in Excerpt B is expressing his willingness to join his friend Ross for lunch. By comparing Excerpts A and B, the differences between the usage of *will* as *volition* and the usage of *will* meaning *future* should become quite apparent.

Promises were also included as implying volition since a speaker who makes a promise is indirectly asserting their willingness to an action, as in Excerpt C from episode 9 of season 8:

Excerpt C

Monica: All right fine! If it means that much to you! But just—there's gonna be a ton left over.

Joey: No there won't! *I promise I will* finish that turkey!

A second parameter for editing the third and final data set involved the deletion of certain expressions. These expressions were *I'll see you later* (12 occurrences), *I'll say!*(3 occurrences) , *I'll tell you what* (6 occurrences), *I'll be right + there, over, back, etc.* (20 occurrences). The reasoning behind their deletion was based on (1) there occurrences suggest they are fixed expressions, (2) they only appear in the *will* categories, and (3) all of these expressions can fall under the description of expressing volition.

A final note on the editing parameters of the third data set involved the decision to only edit those expressions of volition from the first person, e.g. *I will go with you, I'll give you her number,* and *I won't cave in!* This editing decision was reached because it seems more reasonable to argue the case of volition from a first person perspective. A speaker who utters *I will go with you* is obviously referencing a personal willingness and desire to accompany the other party. On the other hand, all instances of *won't* that expressed volition were deleted regardless of perspective as in the following example from episode 9 of season 2:

Monica: Well put it back.

Ross: It uhh, *it won't go back.*

Although Ross is applying *won't* to an object devoid of a will, it is clear that a future meaning is not implied here. The object in the statement is said to be metaphorically refusing, or is unwilling, to be put back in a prior position.

With these parameters, the final data set amounted to 2,831 occurrences of future time expressions (less than 1% of the total corpus). The number of occurrences of all forms of *will* decreased drastically: 'll went from 1051 to 511; *will* from 357 to 267; and *won't* from 95 to 48 (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3Data Set 3 (WILL in a question and WILL of volition removed)

Future Expression	Number of Occurrences	Percentage
WILL (all categories)	826	29.18
'll	511	18.05
will	267	9.43
won't	48	1.7
BGT (all categories)	1623	57.33
be going to	249	8.8
be not going to	12	.42
gonna	1271	44.9
not gonna	91	3.21
Present Progressive	307	10.84
Simple Present	17	.6
Modals	47	1.59
Be about to	11	.39

Total Number of Occurrences = 2,831

The conclusion of the data analysis, discussion and conclusion of the revealed results of this study are made in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to determine the most frequently used future expressions in conversational English using a quantitative corpus-based method, examine patterns of usage, and suggest how the findings in this study may be implemented in ESL teaching. The data collected from a spoken corpus using transcripts from the sitcom *Friends* revealed the answer to the two research questions posed in this study:

1. How do native speakers actually express future time in spoken conversational English?
2. Which future expressions are the most common in spoken conversational English?

Conclusions

In this study, an extensive amount of space was given to determine *what* the future expressions are and *how* they are used in spoken conversational English. An examination of ESL grammar textbooks revealed not only the numerous ways to express future time in English but a lack of uniformity in the order of presenting those future expressions. For instance, some texts introduce *will* first, others *be going to*, another introduced both expressions at the same time, and still one grammar textbook introduced the present progressive and simple present before even *will* and *be going to* (see Chapter 2). Furthemore, an extensive literature review of corpus linguistics revealed the value of frequency counting in relation to grammar and vocabulary instruction. Therefore, a corpus-based analysis of future expressions in spoken conversational English was conducted in order to account for their frequency.

First, this study was a modest attempt to discover which future expressions are actually used in spoken conversational English. The data revealed that the following expressions were present: *will, 'll, won't, be going to, gonna, not gonna, simple present, present progressive, modals,* and *be about to*. Therefore, other tenses, such as *future progressive*, *future perfect,* and

perfect future progressive did not occur in the 349,106 words from 117 transcripts of *Friends* within the corpus created for this research.

Furthermore, this study also sought to discover the frequency of the most common future expressions. *Gonna* (44.9%) is by far the most occurring expression of future time while the contraction *'ll* (18.05%) comes in second. Interestingly, *be going to* and *will*, in their full form occur almost equally (9.22% and 9.43% respectively). The lowest occurring expressions were *be about to* (.39%), *simple present* (.60%), *modals* (1.59%), and *won't* (1.7%). Overall, the forms of *be going to* (57.33%) occurred much more frequently than the forms of *will* (29.18%).

The difference between the numbers of occurrences of *be going to* and *will* is striking. These results appeared after all of the *will*s of volition and request had been removed from the original data set. What these results suggest is that (1) *will* commonly expresses the volition of a person rather than solely a future time; (2) *gonna* is used more commonly for expressing a future time than *will*; and (3) in the cases where *will* does clearly express a future time, *gonna* could substitute for *will*. To illustrate, Excerpt A from chapter 4 could use *gonna* and still retain the same meaning.

Excerpt A

> Joey: Chandler, you have to start getting over her. All right, if you play, you get some fresh air, maybe *it's gonna take your mind off Janice*, and if you don't play, *everyone's gonna be mad at you* 'cause *the teams aren't gonna be even*. Come on.

In conclusion, it could be true that *will* and *gonna* are actually interchangeable when it comes to expressing a future time. Perhaps it ultimately depends on preference of the speaker in which expression is used. However, more research would be needed in order to fully support this claim.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this study can certainly benefit the English language classroom. First of all, the results of this study provide empirical support for material developers. Instead of relying on intuition, textbook writers may establish their lessons on future time with real world data. Directly following this last point is that these results may bring more uniformity and clarity to how the future time in English should be presented in the textbooks. The results clearly show that *gonna* in particular, or *be going to* in general, by a large margin (28% more) is the most frequently used expression of the future in spoken conversational American English. Therefore, it follows that this expression should be introduced to language learners first when covering future time in the classroom. Finally, English language instructors can also directly implement these findings into their language classroom. Many instructors supplement their teaching with materials which exist outside of their textbooks and assigned curriculum. In the same way, they may use these results at their discretion to change their curriculum. For example, with this knowledge, it would make more sense to teach *be going to* first and then *will* even though the text being used in the class may have these expressions sequenced in another way.

A final note on the use of *will* ought to be mentioned here. Roughly half of the uses of *will*, particularly its contracted form *'ll*, were expressions of *volition*. This fact suggests that the reason speakers of English may actually be using the modal *will* is an expression of their willingness, choice, or intention versus an alternative for future. Instead of presenting *will* alongside *be going to*, it may be of more value to introduce them as two completely different functions of grammar – *be going to* as the future expression in English and *will* as an expression of one's volition or choice. Of course, there *are* some future expressions that employ *will*. However, it is the contention of the researcher that these occurrences could be replaced with *be*

going to with no change in meaning. All the occurrences where the meaning changes are those occurrences where *will* signifies volition and not future. Another consideration is whether or not *be going to* could express volition. Current literature does not support the notion that *be going to* can express the volition of the speaker.

Although readers of this research may to read more of a discussion into the patterns of usage between *will* and *be going to*, such an investigation was beyond the scope of this study.

Since expanding upon this study and/ or addressing related issues with further research could prove beneficial to the field of TESOL, the following suggestions should be taken into account.

1. First, this study could be repeated using a similar methodology and approach except with a much larger corpus, such as the *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*. A larger corpus could represent American spoken English better and perhaps take into account more regional varieties depending on how large and vast the corpus is. In this study, a certain variety of American English was analyzed corresponding to the language of the sitcom *Friends* with a corpus size of 349, 106.

2. Second, a similar study could be conducted to determine what the most commonly used future expression are in written English. There are clear differences between the language of writing and the language of casual conversation. A study on future forms in written English could produce different results, or help shed light on the choice of forms. For example, depending on the purpose of the writing (email or term paper), the language will be different and, therefore, the choice of using one future form over another could based on some interpersonal factor as McCarthy and Carter (1995) suggested.

3. Third, a focused investigation of the distinct patterns of use between *will* and *be going to* would certainly make for a follow-up study from this research. The current study sought to determine the frequency of future forms that emerged from spoken conversation using the sitcom *Friends*. Although some discussion was made about the patterns of usage between *will* and *be going to* in terms of volition, it was beyond the focus of this study to delve into the realm of determining the factors that cause choice of forms.

4. Fourth, another study could investigate whether regional dialects influence the choice of *will* and *be going to*. In this study, the language that was used to create the corpus was primarily taken from white middle-class Americans living in the North Eastern region of the United States of America as evidenced in a TV sitcom. The research question behind this investigation would be to determine whether or not people in different regions, such as the South or Mid-West, would produce the same frequency of *will* and *be going to*.

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