

## 【研究報告】

英語の未来形の使用に関するオンラインガイダンスの  
一般的な品質について  
～上位10の英語文法ウェブサイトで  
入手可能な情報の比較分析～

On the General Quality of Online Guidance Relating to the Use of  
the English Future Tense  
A Comparative Analysis of Information Available on 10 of the Top  
English Grammar Websites

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### ABSTRACT

The present paper, which is principally for the attention of authors of online English grammar guides, investigates 10 of the most popular English-language English grammar websites with the aim of assessing the overall quality of tuition provided concerning the correct use of future tense forms, a significant topic for English-learners, finding that some measure of improvement appears to be needed.

*Keywords:* comparative analysis, future tense, grammar website, online resources

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Ratiocination & Objectives

It would amount to little more than a statement of the obvious to assert that today's language learners, when seeking written guidance relating to grammar and usage, have the choice of referring to either printed books or online resources in order to obtain the information that they require.

Online resources, however, despite their obvious convenience, are not necessarily the most reliable sources of information in every case. Indeed, Said<sup>1)</sup> (p.1564) goes so far as to issue the following warning:

“...there is a great caution to using the Internet materials as references for educational or academic purpose [*sic*]...because, without having the skills and knowledge to filter unreliable information, the resources may not likely be helpful. Challenges and issues are often encountered in evaluating suitable resources such as the credibility and objectivity of the web authors...”

With this thought in mind, it might be enlightening to attempt to ascertain to what extent online guidance may be relied upon to provide information on linguistic matters such as grammar and usage.

The task that the present author herewith undertakes is consequently to examine the information presented on various publicly available<sup>\*1</sup> grammar websites with a view to obtaining not a precise, complete or definitive evaluation of, but at least a preliminary insight into, the reliability of online English grammar tuition for EFL learners of intermediate level (or thereabouts).

Naturally, however, practical considerations dictate that certain limitations in the conducting of such a study be observed, which are essentially the following:

- (1) On account of the vast number of websites that purport to provide guidance on English grammar and usage, the study will focus on a selection, in this case 10, of the most popular/frequently accessed websites (listed in section 1.2 below, with URL details provided in the references section) written in English (see footnote 4). Regarding also the method used to identify the websites as being among the most popular/frequently accessed, see footnote 4.
- (2) On account of the large number of English grammar topics that could reasonably be regarded as presenting particular difficulty to the learner (use of articles, conditionals, relative clauses, and so forth), the study will focus on one specific topic (see below).

As regards the selection of that focal topic (which, with so many from which to choose, must perforce be somewhat arbitrary), while the English language possesses many that could be considered difficult even for more advanced or fluent users, we will focus our attention in this case on guidance relating to the future tense<sup>\*2</sup>.

The correct use of the English future tense can pose a significant challenge to learners. Indeed, Swan<sup>2)</sup> (p.219) asserts that

“this is a complicated area of grammar: the differences between the meanings and uses of the different structures are not easy to analyze and describe clearly. In many...situations, two or more structures are possible with similar meanings.”

Most EFL teachers are familiar with the proclivity of French learners to produce such solecisms as “I’ll do it when I *will arrive*”<sup>\*3</sup> (as opposed to grammatically correct “I’ll do it when I *arrive*”), and, needless to say, the problem is not confined to speakers of Indo-European languages. Webb<sup>3)</sup> (pp.88-89) notes a number of examples of incorrect (or, at best, highly unidiomatic) future tense sentences frequently produced by Japanese learners, such as

“I will play tennis with Tim on Sunday.”

for expressing a preconceived intention, as opposed to the correct/natural options, to wit the *be going to* form (as in “I’m going to play tennis with Tim on Sunday”) or, alternatively, the present progressive (as in “I’m playing tennis with Tim on Sunday”).

Thus, it is clear that at least a rudimentary mastery of the future tense is one prerequisite for any EFL learner who aspires to proficiency in the English language.

Finally, it will, of course, in attempting to assess the quality of information provided by the websites, also be necessary to determine a set of standards by which that quality is to be judged. Once again, with practical limitations precluding the simultaneous consulting of multiple authorities on every point, we elect here to entrust ourselves to one that has, over the course of several decades, established for itself among EFL teachers a reputation as an outstanding reference source for any

query relating to English grammar, namely “A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language” (Quirk et al., 1985)<sup>4</sup>. Regarding the identification of key areas of information provided here concerning the grammar topic in question, see section 2.1. (Evaluation Criteria).

#### 1.2. List of Websites Surveyed<sup>4</sup> (in alphabetical order) with Self-descriptions (where available)

WEBSITE NAME: British Council Learn English<sup>5</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “Revise and practise your grammar to help you increase your confidence and improve your language level.”

WEBSITE NAME: Cambridge Dictionary Grammar<sup>6</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “Get clear grammar explanations with hundreds of examples of how grammar is used in natural written and spoken English.”

WEBSITE NAME: Daily Writing Tips<sup>7</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: None clearly provided, but it comprises sections titled ‘grammar’ and ‘grammar 101’.

WEBSITE NAME: English Club<sup>8</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: None clearly provided, but it comprises sections titled ‘Grammar’ and ‘Grammar Help.’

WEBSITE NAME: EnglishPage - Grammar Tutorials<sup>9</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: None clearly provided, but it comprises sections titled ‘Online English Grammar Book’ and ‘Grammar Tutorials and Reference Tools’.

WEBSITE NAME: GrammarBook<sup>10</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “Welcome to the No. 1 website for helpful rules, real-world examples, and FUN quizzes.”

WEBSITE NAME: Oxford University Press (English Grammar)<sup>11</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: None clearly provided, but it contains a link to an “About Us” page that states: “It is our mission to further Oxford University’s objective of excellence in research, scholarship, and education by publishing worldwide.”

WEBSITE NAME: Perfect English Grammar<sup>12</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “Improve your English – with Perfect English Grammar.”

WEBSITE NAME: Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)<sup>13</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “These OWL resources will help you use correct grammar in your writing.”

WEBSITE NAME: Using English - Grammar Exercises<sup>14</sup>

SELF-DESCRIPTION: “Boost your language skills, build your vocabulary, and sharpen your grammar with our wide range of interactive English quizzes. Whether you’re a beginner or an advanced learner, you’ll find exercises tailored to your level — covering everything from grammar rules to practical usage and vocabulary.”

## 2. APPROACH

### 2.1. Evaluation Criteria

Since a survey covering every possible English future tense form would make for an exceptionally lengthy paper, we shall confine ourselves to consideration of three structures whose primal significance/commonality can reasonably be inferred<sup>\*5</sup> from the fact they are the first to be covered by Quirk et al. (pp.213-218) in the section titled “Some means of expressing future time”, to wit: (1) *will/shall* + infinitive, (2) *be going to* + infinitive, and (3) the present progressive, which, by virtue of their primacy as expressers of future meaning, we hereinafter term our ‘key structures’.

Regarding each key structure, Quirk et al.’s observations concerning their usage (most particularly insofar as they relate to the needs of EFL learners) may be summarized as follows:

Regarding key structure (1) [*shall/will* ~]

With regard to its volitional use, it typically expresses “promises/threats etc.”, as in (p.214)

“We *shall ensure* that the repairs are carried out according to your wishes.”

Regarding key structure (2) [*be going to* ~]

Its overall use is expressible as “future fulfilment of the present”, this being realized in one of two senses, either as “future fulfilment of present intention”, as in (p.214)

“Leila is going to lend us her camera.”

or as “future result of present cause”, as exemplified by

“She’s *going to have* a baby.”

Regarding key structure (3) [*be ~ing*]

It can be characterized as “future arising from present arrangement, plan or programme”, as in (p.215)

“I’m *taking* the children to the zoo (on Saturday).”

With regard to this structure, however, the caveat is included that “the future use of the present progressive is limited to actions brought about by human endeavour”, with locutions such as (p.215)

\* *The trees are losing their leaves soon.*

naturally excluded by dint of the absurd implication that

“a tree has control over its future”.

Accordingly, we shall expect instructional websites to see fit to caution users not only as to the limitation noted above, but additionally, with regard to the use of the will/shall-future – not least on the grounds that the notion of “present intention”, specifically referred to by Quirk et al. (p.214) with regard to structure (2), is absent from the description of (1) (intentionality being cited purely in terms of threats, promises etc.) – that it is not used to express a plan already formulated in the mind of the speaker prior to the time of utterance, or, as Webb puts it (p.88),

“we use ‘going to’, not ‘will’, to talk about definite future plans and intentions which have been made before the moment of speaking”.

Consequent to the above, we shall be surveying the online tutorials for clear indications in some form as to the following conditions of use of our three key future tense structures, which will together constitute 6 evaluation criteria (henceforth abbreviated to ‘ECs’).

Regarding key structure (1) [*shall/will* ~]

EC 1a: That it is used to express, or seek to elicit, decisions made *at* the time of utterance concerning future actions (offers, promises, threats, etc.).

EC 1b: That it is **not** used in reference to decisions concerning future actions made *prior to* the time of utterance.

Regarding key structure (2) [*be going to* ~]

EC 2a: That it is used to express, or seek to elicit, plans/intentions concerning future actions.

EC 2b: That it is the natural choice for making predictions about future events grounded in present evidence.

Regarding key structure (3) [*be* ~*ing*]

EC 3a: That it is used to express, or seek to elicit, plans/arrangements concerning future actions.

EC 3b: That it is **not** used simply to predict future events.

## 2.2. Evaluation Method

While it would clearly be naïve to assume that any attempt to assess the quality of a verbal explanation can be entirely free of subjective judgement on the part of the assessor, it is hoped that objectivity can, to some degree at least, be maintained by adopting a system of numerical assessment on a criterion-by-criterion basis, rather than relying on impressionistic overall descriptions such as ‘fairly good’, ‘rather poor’, etc.

Further, while it would clearly be tempting, for simplicity’s sake, to award either 1 point (=“evaluation criterion met”) or zero points (“criterion not met”), since there will inevitably be some ‘gray zones’ with regard to which an absolute determination of either 1 or 0 would be unwise, or perhaps even unfair, it seems appropriate to allow in some way for this possibility in the numerical assessment, whilst at the same time endeavoring to avoid an overly complex assessment procedure with regard to every language point on every website.

Accordingly, the following system has been adopted: for each evaluation criterion that the tutorial seems (by the lights of the information provided by Quirk et al. and the presumed significance of that information in terms of order of presentation) to cover adequately, we will award 2 points. For each whose coverage, while present to some degree, seems

in some way vague/equivocal/insufficiently clear, we will award 1 point. For each whose coverage is entirely absent, we will award 0 points.

Thus, with 6 evaluation criteria and a maximum of 2 points per criterion, total points awarded will potentially range from 12 (good) to 0 (poor).

### 3. SURVEY RESULTS

#### 3.1. Verbal Description/Analysis

Websites are here presented in order of point score (from highest to lowest), or, where scores are the same, in alphabetical order. Regarding evaluation criteria, since order of treatment by the website author may be presumed to reflect, at least to some degree, the importance that (s)he attaches to each, they are covered in this section essentially in the order in which they appear - or, at least, are most readily locatable - on the website. (However, an ordered breakdown of point scores is provided in section 3.2.)

#### *Cambridge Dictionary Grammar*

While 2 points are awarded for EC 1a, in light of the statement that

“*Will* and *shall* ...are used to announce decisions and to make offers.”

, on account of the absence of the relevant caution, none are awarded for EC 1b.

Regarding structure (2), 2 points are awarded for EC 2a, by virtue of the statement that

“We use *be going to* to talk about future plans and intentions...the decision about the future plans has already been made.”

and likewise for EC 2b, on account of the observation that

“We use *be going to* to predict something that we think is certain to happen or which we have evidence for now.”

. As regards structure (3), it states both that

“the present continuous can refer to the future. It shows that we have already decided something and usually that we have already made a plan or arrangement.”

(hence, 2 points for EC 3a) and that

“we don’t use the present continuous when we predict something.”

(thus, also 2 points for EC 3b).

The total number of points awarded to this website is therefore 10.

*Perfect English Grammar*

This website notes, regarding structure (3), that it

“is for definite future arrangements (with a future time word). In this case we have already made a plan and we are pretty sure that the event will happen in the future.”

, which clearly justifies the awarding of 2 points for EC 3a, but the absence of the relevant caution concerning ‘shall/will’ precludes that of any points for EC 3b.

Regarding structure (1), it notes its use with regard to

“promises/requests/refusals/offers”

- hence, 2 points for EC 1a - and, furthermore, that

“in a similar way, we often use ‘will’ when we're talking about a decision at the moment of speaking.”

. While this does not explicitly constitute a warning to avoid *shall/will* for statements of intention, it does at least appear to rule it out by elimination, and so, when viewed in conjunction with the accompanying example dialogue:

“A: I’m cold.

B: I’ll close the window.”

, 2 points also for EC 1b would appear to be justified.

As regards structure (2), it is noted that

“we often use ‘be going to’ to talk about our future intentions and plans. We have usually made our plans before the moment of speaking.”

- hence, the full 2 points for EC 2a - and that

“we can also use ‘be going to’ to make a prediction about the future. Often it's possible to use both ‘be going to’ and ‘will’ but it's more common to use ‘be going to’ if we can see evidence in the present.”

. Thus, we likewise award 2 points for EC 2b.

The total number of points for this website is therefore 10.

*English Club – Grammar*

We can award 2 points for EC 1b, in view of the observation that

“We use the Future Simple tense when there is no plan or decision to do something before we speak. We make the decision spontaneously at the time of speaking.”

. Despite there being no explicit reference to such categories as the making of offers, promises, etc., since this is made relatively clear by the examples provided, e.g.

“Hold on. I’ll get a pen.”

, it seems reasonable to award 1 point for EC 1a.

Regarding structure (3), it states that we

“use the Present Continuous tense to talk about the future when we have planned to do something before we speak.”

, which clearly justifies the full 2 points for EC 3a, but it omits the caution regarding predictions. Thus, 0 points are awarded for EC 3b.

Regarding structure (2), it states that

“We use *going to* when we have the intention to do something before we speak. We have already made a decision before speaking.”

, and that

“we often use *going to* to make a prediction about the future. Our prediction is based on present evidence.”

, this clearly justifying 2 points for both EC 2a and EC 2b.

The total number of points for this website is therefore 9.

#### *British Council Learn English*

This website states that

“we can use the present continuous for plans or arrangements.”

. Thus, we can award 2 points for EC 3a.

With regard to structure (1), clear reference to offers and promises earns 2 points for EC 1a.

Regarding structure (2), reference is made to ‘plans or intentions’; hence we award 2 points for EC 2a. Further, the note as to its use

“to make predictions based on evidence we can see”

is sufficient to earn 2 points for EC 2b.



Unfortunately, however, no caution is forthcoming relating to either EC 1b or EC 3b, and so, with 0 points for each, the total for this website is 8 points.

*EnglishPage - Grammar Tutorials*

2 points are awarded for EC 1a in view of the statement that

“*Will* often suggests that a speaker will do something voluntarily... *Will* is usually used in promises.”

and also for EC 2a, in light of the observation that

“*Be going to* expresses that something is a plan.”

. However, while it asserts that

“both *will* and *be going to* can express the idea of a general prediction about the future.”

, with no mention of the factor of present evidence to distinguish the use of the one structure from the other, we can award no more than 1 point for EC 2b.

Also, the lack of a clear caution regarding the avoidance of ‘will’ for the expression of plans formed prior to the time of utterance means that no points can be awarded for EC 1b.

Regarding structure (3), it observes that

“sometimes, speakers use the present continuous to indicate that something will or will not happen in the near future.”.

While this statement alone - in failing to indicate whether the ‘something’ in question is an intention or simply a prediction - evidently is, in and of itself, insufficient to justify 2 points, when it is read in conjunction with the examples provided, which include:

“I am meeting some friends after work.”

and

“Is he visiting his parents this weekend?”

, the matter seems relatively clear, and we consequently feel justified in awarding 2 points for EC 3a, but, naturally, none for EC 3b.

The total score for this website is therefore 7 points.

*Using English - Grammar Exercises*

Regarding structure (3), it observes that

“the Present Progressive can ...be used to talk about future arrangements.”

(hence, 2 points for EC 3a) but, failing to note the related limitation, it scores 0 points for EC 3b.

The main purpose of this website, however (aside from supplying an indisputably comprehensive glossary of academic grammar terminology) appears to consist in responding to questions from individual learners rather than providing practical, general guidance. We are therefore sadly unable, within the strict terms of our survey, to award it points in any other category, and it therefore achieves a total of only 2 points.

#### *Daily Writing Tips*

We are, under the terms of our survey, regrettably unable to award this website any points, since an exhaustive search of its ‘grammar’ section failed to locate any relevant general information about the use of the future tense.

#### *GrammarBook*

Only the sketchiest information relating to future tense forms seems to be available. Regarding structure (1), for example, it states merely that

“this describes something that will happen in the future.”

, but, with no indication as to the nature of this ‘something’ (in terms of offer, promise, prediction, etc.), we cannot reasonably award any points for either EC 1a or EC 1b.

Regarding structures (2) and (3), it fares even less well, since they apparently merit no mention whatsoever as future forms.

Thus, the total for this website stands at 0 points.

#### *Oxford University Press (English Grammar)*

This site offers a limited amount of instructional material that can be freely accessed without subscription, but sadly, since this material does not relate to future tense forms, we are unable, within the terms of our survey, to award any points.

#### *Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)*

This site unfortunately appears to carry no systematic information relating to forms expressing futurity, and so we are regrettably unable to award it any points.

### **3.2. Tabular Presentation of Findings**

For ease of reference, point allocation by evaluation criterion and total point scores are listed below.

#### *Cambridge Dictionary Grammar*

EC 1a: 2/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 2/2

EC 2b: 2/2  
EC 3a: 2/2  
EC 3b: 2/2  
Total: 10/12

*Perfect English Grammar*

EC 1a: 2/2  
EC 1b: 2/2  
EC 2a: 2/2  
EC 2b: 2/2  
EC 3a: 2/2  
EC 3b: 0/2  
Total: 10/12

*English Club*

EC 1a: 1/2  
EC 1b: 2/2  
EC 2a: 2/2  
EC 2b: 2/2  
EC 3a: 2/2  
EC 3b: 0/2  
Total: 9/12

*British Council Learn English*

EC 1a: 2/2  
EC 1b: 0/2  
EC 2a: 2/2  
EC 2b: 2/2  
EC 3a: 2/2  
EC 3b: 0/2  
Total: 8/12

*EnglishPage - Grammar Tutorials*

EC 1a: 2/2  
EC 1b: 0/2  
EC 2a: 2/2  
EC 2b: 1/2  
EC 3a: 2/2  
EC 3b: 0/2  
Total: 7/12

*Using English - Grammar Exercises*

EC 1a: 0/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 0/2

EC 2b: 0/2

EC 3a: 2/2

EC 3b: 0/2

Total: 2/12

*Daily Writing Tips*

EC 1a: 0/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 0/2

EC 2b: 0/2

EC 3a: 0/2

EC 3b: 0/2

Total: 0/12

*GrammarBook*

EC 1a: 0/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 0/2

EC 2b: 0/2

EC 3a: 0/2

EC 3b: 0/2

Total: 0/12

*Oxford University Press (English Grammar)*

EC 1a: 0/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 0/2

EC 2b: 0/2

EC 3a: 0/2

EC 3b: 0/2

Total: 0/12

*Purdue Online Writing Lab (OWL)*

EC 1a: 0/2

EC 1b: 0/2

EC 2a: 0/2

EC 2b: 0/2

EC 3a: 0/2

EC 3b: 0/2

Total: 0/12

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Without a single website attaining the maximum score of 12/12, and with 40% of those surveyed scoring 0/12, it would appear reasonable to assert that, in overall terms, treatment of the English future tense in online English grammar guides is in need of some measure of improvement.

Naturally, these survey results must, in all fairness, be qualified by two caveats: one (concerning individual assessments), that a low score attained under the strict terms and conditions of this survey should not be interpreted as implying that the website in question is of no use at all (indeed, it may contain a wide variety of pertinent and useful information), and two (concerning the overall assessment), that a survey relating to a different grammar topic (e.g. the use of relative clauses or of the subjunctive mood) might indeed have yielded quite different, and far more pleasing, results, at both the individual and the overall level.

Nonetheless, it is the present author's hope that both currently active authors of online resources (whether revising old, or producing new, guidance) and would-be authors thinking of entering the field of online grammar tuition, may be prompted by these survey results to devote a little extra care to their treatment of the future tense.

Finally, given that this survey focuses on the treatment of a single grammar topic (albeit one of some significance for learners), it is clear that it can at best do no more than offer a preliminary glimpse into the general quality of online English grammar guidance, and that further surveys, relating to a variety of other areas of English grammar, will be required if a more complete picture is to be obtained.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>\*1</sup> By "publicly available" we mean "freely available to Internet users without special subscription or the payment of fees".

<sup>\*2</sup> As is noted by both Quirk et al. (p.213) and Downing & Locke<sup>15)</sup> (p.353), English does not possess a 'future tense' in the strictest sense of the term. In contrast to the inflected single-word verb forms that we encounter in e.g. French or Italian, English possesses only a variety of multi-word structures ('[will/shall V], [will/shall be Ving], [(be) going to V]', and so forth) realizing reference, in a variety of senses and to varying degrees of certainty, to states/events due or expected to obtain/occur at some future time. For the sake of simplicity and ease of reference, however, we use the term 'future tense' throughout this paper to refer to any or all such structures.

<sup>\*3</sup> By a mistaken, but entirely understandable, analogy with the corresponding French sentence, 'Je le ferai quand j'arriverai' (see also note 2 above).

<sup>\*4</sup> Popularity/frequency of access was determined according to the results of a number of similarly-worded online searches conducted with the aid of AI (*ChatGPT*<sup>16)</sup>), with keywords such as "most popular English grammar websites", "most frequently accessed English grammar websites", and so forth. Naturally, since precise numerical statistics relating to frequency of access are not publicly accessible, we have little choice here but to accept the AI's findings. Regarding

source-language: while there doubtless exist many excellent online English grammar resources composed in languages other than English, we confine our attention here to those written in English (presumably - although this naturally cannot be guaranteed - authored, or at the very least checked, by competent native speakers). Regarding the level of tuition provided by websites included in the survey: online grammar sites generally do not advertise themselves as being aimed specifically e.g. only at beginners, or exclusively at intermediate-level students. We have therefore found it fair to assume that, unless otherwise stated, either in the title of the site or its own self-description (where one is provided), the site is general purpose and aims to cater to various levels of English ability. Regarding the nature/range of the websites included in the survey: among those identified as among the most popular, we have restricted ourselves to those which, upon individual examination, manifestly - whether by dint of the website's name or of its self-description (see section 1.2) - purport to provide guidance on matters of English grammar, thus excluding websites devoted to providing guidance relating only, for example, to English essay-writing techniques. This selection method has naturally resulted, however, in the inclusion in the survey of websites providing little or no guidance on our specified grammar topic (whilst they may well provide adequate guidance on others), and, as harsh as this approach may seem, such websites have accordingly been awarded low scores.

\*5 Not least in light of the fact that the first structure treated is described (p.213) as “the most common way of expressing futurity”.

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