

A REAPPRAISAL OF JAMES WHITE'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE «FIXING» OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Ever since the publication of Charles Carpenter Fries's well-known monograph, «The Periphrastic Future with *Shall* and *Will* in Modern English» (1925) it had been assumed that the first grammarian to «fix and ascertain» the English language with regard to the complete set of rules governing the uses of *shall* and *will* was William Ward. Fries asserted that William Ward's, *An Essay On Grammar* (1765) contained «the first complete discussion of the meanings and uses of *shall* and *will*» (Fries, pág. 974). Recently, however, a study undertaken by the present author indicates that William Ward was not the first to record the complete set of rules; a relatively unknown grammarian, James White, whom Fries does not even mention in the study referred to above, deserves that «honor», even though his direct influence on succeeding generations has been slight.

In the introductory paragraph to Part I of his study, Fries notes that «in the search for the facts concerning the framing, development and general acceptance of the conventional rules for *shall* and *will* all the available English grammars published during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries and many of those of the first half of the 19th century were examined... (Fries, pág. 967) (This term «grammars» includes dictionaries and other discussions of the language published during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries). In the next paragraph he adds that «only those [grammars] are included in this list in which is given some statement of *shall* and *will* as signs of the future tense». (Fries, pág. 967). Forty-six works were ultimately selected.

Fries continues by reviewing the significant facts revealed by his investigation of the grammars in question, which he divides into eight categories with numerous subdivisions. These categories can be summarized as follows: 1) «In the grammars published before 1622 there is no indication of any distinction between the use of the auxiliaries *shall* and *will*, with any of the three grammatical persons, when joined with the infinitive to form the future tense.» (Fries, pág. 967). 2) «The first statement of a distinction of use between *shall* and *will* in forming the future tense was found in George Mason's *Grammaire Angloise* (1622).» (Fries, págs. 971). 3) «In the grammars published between 1622 the first appearance of the conventional distinction and 1653, when John Wallis formulated the first definite rules for *shall* and *will* in declarative sentences there is no indication of any discrimination between the uses of these two words in the formation of the future.» (Fries, pág. 972). 4) «The grammars published between 1653 and 1762 either fail to indicate any distinction between the two words as auxiliaries, as did all those, except Mason's, before 1653, or (with two exceptions) they simply copy or repeat the statements appearing in Wallis.» (Fries, pág. 972). 5) «In 1762, in the grammar of Robert Lowth, appeared the first discussion of the uses of *shall* and *will* in interrogative sentences as distinct from the uses in declarative statements.» (Fries, págs. 973-4) 6) «The grammar of William Ward (1765) contains the first complete discussion of the meanings and uses of *shall* and *will* with a thoroughgoing attempt to form the rules on the basis of the fundamental meanings of the two words. Here we have not only the usual meanings given to the uses of *shall* and *will* in independent declarative sentences, and in questions, as in Lowth's grammar, the meanings of *shall* with the first and third persons and *will* with the second person, but in addition the filling out of the meanings in the other possible situations in interrogative sentences, and a complete explanation of the meaning and uses in 'compound sentences' and 'suppositions'.» (Fries, página 974). 7) «In spite of the complete discussion in Ward's grammar (1765) which in most respects gives all the features of the received rules as set forth in modern textbooks, the grammars following his for many years did not usually offer a complete set of rules, and some gave statements absolutely opposed to the uses here indicated and later conventionally accepted.» (Fries, pág. 976). 8) «Only after

the first quarter of the 19th century does the complete discussions of the rules on *shall* and *will* in independent declarative statements, in interrogative sentences and in subordinate clauses become a common feature of textbooks of English grammar, and many even at this time have not adopted the whole system first published in the grammar of William Ward in 1765.» (Fries, págs. 977-78).

In order to determine whether the categorical statements just quoted are valid in the light of present-day linguistic scholarship, over 300 English grammars as well as other related works (dictionaries and treatises related to English grammars) published by R. C. Alston (Facsimile Editions, Scolar Press: Menston, England) were examined. The results of this study indicate that Fries's sixth point needs to be modified, since it was found that a number of important points attributed by Fries exclusively to Ward are also found in James White's, *The English Verb* (1761). Although Ward's grammar does contain an all-inclusive discussion of the meanings and uses of *shall* and *will*, White's grammar also «fills out the meaning» in other possible situations in questions and, in addition, gives detailed explanations for some situations in dependent clauses—conditional and suppositional, especially after «when»—furthermore, it treats the substitution of the present tense for the future in dependent clauses. In other words, White's grammar, in its treatment of the uses of *shall* and *will*, in almost all respects predates the assertions made in Ward's, with the conspicuous exception of Ward's reference to an individual's determining in one way or another his own future state by the use of *will*, and the reverse for the use of *shall*.

Following are some excerpts from both James White's *The English Verb* and William Ward's *Essay on Grammar* which demonstrate the priority of most of White's observations, the detail and thoroughness exhibited by both grammarians, and of course the redundancy and dilation which were commonly found in the writings of eighteenth century grammarians.

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(From: *The English Verb* by James White)

The sign of the first future, you know, is *shall*, and of the second *will*. As both these signs equally respect the future, it becomes a nicety, to discern when it is proper to use the one, and when the other.

To fix this, I will place before you the manner in which both are used, with such reflections as may determine the propriety of their application.

Our method shall be, to consider the force and tendency of these signs separately, as they are severally employed by the different persons of the verb.

To begin then with the first person.

Shall is used, in the first person, to express the Speaker's disposition with respect to what may happen, provided it so fall out.

I *shall* be glad to merit by my sword
Thásylum which I seek among
the Volci.

Thomson.

It is also used, in the first person, to express what the speaker apprehends will be his condition, from the circumstances in which he feels himself at present.

Merrily, merrily, *shall* I live now,
Under the blossom that hangs on the
bough.

Shakespeare.

It is also used, in this person, simply to point out a future event, with respect to one's own feelings.

Why, that's my dainty Ariel!
I *shall* miss thee.

Shakespeare.

Or with respect to what will befall one in the natural course of things.

I *shall* fall
Like a bright exhalation in the
ev'ning,
And no man see me more.

Shakespeare.

In our last we took notice of the general import of the first future, when used in the first person; in this we shall observe the same, concerning the second future, when used in its first person,

At this instant
 He bores me with some trick,
 he's gone to thinking;
I'll follow, and outstare him.

Shakespeare.

Here *I'll* which is much oftener the contraction of *I will* than of *I shall*, intimates rather present resolution, than future conduct; at least, it does not merely point at futurity, but intimates that a present determination of mind is the cause of what will happen. Such also is the force of it in the following passages.

I'll hide my silver-beard in a
 gold beaver
 And in my vaunt-brace put this
 withered brawn.

Shakespeare.

It likewise implies not only resolution, but approbation.

Give me that man
 That is not passions' slave,
 and I *will* wear him
 In my heart's core.

Shakespeare.

It sometimes implies displeasure, and contains a threatening.

If thou more murmur'st,
 I *will* rend an oak,
 And peg thee in his knotty entrails.

Shakespeare.

It gives the highest assurance.

I swear to thee by Cupid's
 strongest bow, ...
 Tomorrow, truly, I *will* meet
 with thee.

Shakespeare.

As in the first person singular, so in the first person plural, *shall* and *will* are differently applied.

Thus *shall* foretells what must happen; and may do this sometimes ironically.

We *shall* lose our time,
And all be turn'd to barnacles
and apes.

Shakespeare.

It proposes what is to be performed.

Such noble scenes, as draw the
eye to show
We *shall* present.

Shakespeare.

It asks a question.

Shall we send that foolish carrion,
Mrs. quickly to him?

Shakespeare.

And in this manner of its application, it is sometimes left to be supplied by the hearer or reader.

Return! said Hector, fir'd with
stern disdain:
What, *coop* whole armies in our
walls again?

Pope.

Here *coop* stands for *shall we coop*.
But *will*, in the first person plural, implies present resolution.

Brother, we *will* proclaim you out
of hand.

Shakespeare.

Or determination with respect to the future.

If you can command these elements
to silence, and work the peace of
the present, we *will* not argue
more.

Shakespeare.

No. 65

Thus we have taken into review the first and second futures, and compared them together in their first persons singular and plural.

For the persons of the verb are mutually related; the first person singular to the first person plural, and the second person singular to the second person plural, and the third person singular to the third person plural.

Thus you see whence the relationship arises, which subsists between the persons of the verb.

And from viewing the two futures, as used in their first persons; you will observe with respect to the first of them, whose sign is *shall* that it is used either to foretell events, or to express submission to the orders of a superior.

When used to foretell events, it may be called the prophetic tense.

And considering the second future, whose sign is *will*, it must appear to you, from every instance that hath been given of it as used in the first person whether singular or plural, that it always implies firmness and resolution with respect to the exertion of our own will, inclination, or passions; and is therefore a style more accommodated to friendship and equality of rank, than to that distance which separates inferiors from those above them.

And lastly, with respect to these two tenses as used in the first person, you'll observe, that as the first future simply relates to eventual conduct, enjoyment, or sufferance, without any intimation of these being the result of personal will or inclination: we propose questions in the first persons of the first future, but not of the second. Thus we say, *shall I*, or *shall we*, do so or so? but never, *will I?* or *will we?* for although we may be in a doubt about events, or about the orders or determinations of others; yet, we can never doubt, or want to be informed, about our own will and inclination.

No. 66

We now proceed to consider *shall* and *will*, or the first and second futures, as used in the second person.

To begin with *shall*.—It is used in the second person to intimate command, and a superiority in the speaker, over the person spoken to.

Thyself *shall* cross the seas, and
bid the false Edward battle.

Shakespeare.

It also intimates a threatening.

Thou *shall* not live to brag what
we have offered.

Shakespeare.

It is also used in the prophetic style.

Tester *I'll* have in pouch,
whe you *shall* lack.

Shakespeare.

And it proposes a question with respect to the general event.

But *shall* you, on your know-
ledge, find this way?

Shakespeare.

No. 67

In using the second future in its second person, we sometimes intimate our own persuasion concerning another's intention.

Thou dost me yet but little harm,
thou *wilt* anon.

Shakespeare.

Or concerning his future conduct.

But you *will take exceptions*
to my boon.

Shakespeare.

It is used by way of supposition with respect to another's inclination or consent.

If thou *wilt* go with me to the
alehouse, so; if not, thou
art a Hebrew, a Jew, and not
worth the name of a Christian.

Shakespeare.

Will, in the second person, often belongs to the determinative mood, and insinuates the present determination or resolution of the person spoken to...

In the way of question it is diversely applied. Sometimes it contains an appeal to the person's self, in regard to his will and inclination.

And *wilt* thou still be hammering
treachery?

Shakespeare.

And sometimes it contains in it a demand.

What say'st thou? *Wilt* thou be
of our consort?
Say ay, and be the captain of us
all.

Shakespeare.

No. 68

Shall is used in the third person, much in the same way it was in the second. For it conveys a threatening.

That *shall* be scoured in his
ranc'rous heart.

Shakespeare.

It conveys encouragement in the form of promise.

Besides, a brave large goblet
shall be thine.

Shakespeare.

It intimates what shall happen at the command of the speaker.

This gentle and unforced accord
of Hamlet sits smiling to my
heart, in grace whereof no jocund
health, that Denmark drinks to
day, but the great cannon to the
clouds *shall* tell.

Shakespeare.

It prophecies.

Long *shall* the race of just
Arcesius reign, and Isles remote
enlarge his bold domain.

Pope.

It question concerning the general event.

I am their mother, who *shall* bar
me from them?

Shakespeare.

And it gives assurance.

Here *shall* the wand'ring stranger
find his home.

Pope.

No. 69

The second future is used in the third person, to declare, not in the way of prophecy but of simple affirmation or conjecture, what may happen.

She *will* outstrip all praise,
and make it halt behind her.

Shakespeare.

By means of the second future, we, in the way of reasoning, draw an inference from what has been promis'd.

Shrunk with dry famine, and with
toils declin'd, the drooping body
will desert the mind.

Pope.

Or we make a supposition, or express our hopes of fears, concerning futurity.

I fear, I fear, '*twill* prove a
giddy world.

Shakespeare.

Will in the determinative mood and third person, as also in the future, is expressive of the nature, and state or disposition, not only of living beings and qualities, but of inanimate thing.

The Moor is of a free and open
nature: and *will* as tenderly be
led by the nose, as asses are.

Shakespeare.

In the way of question, *will* either simply refers to futurity, or to the inclination and disposition of the person spoken of, or appeals to that inclination.

How *will* the country, for these
woeful chances, mis-think the King,
and not be satisfied.

Shakespeare.

No. 70

To bring together in one view, the observations which have arisen to us concerning the use and application of *shall* and *will*, which are the signs of the first and second futures in English.

Shall in the first person whether singular or plural, as when we say *I shall* or *we shall*, respects futurity either in the way of reasoning, prediction, or declaration of submission to the will of a superior. It also admits of the form of a question, as when we say *shall I?* or *shall we?*

But *will* in the first person wheter singular or plural, as when we say *I will* or *we will*, does not always respect futurity, but sometimes the present time. When it respects the present time, it belongs to the determinative mood, and marks the speaker's resolutions as proceeding from his own approbation or dislike, and not from the will of another. When it respects futurity, it marks the future conduct, as arising from the speaker's own inclination, and not from any deference to another's judgment or rank. Nor does it admit of being put by way of question, as in *will I? will we?*—For we can never be strangers to our own will, nor can any other person inform us so well concerning it, as we ourselves can.

Again, *shall* in the second person whether singular or plural, as when we say *thou shalt* or *ye shall*, represents the speaker as in some degree of authority, eminence, or power, over the person addressed; for it is in that style we command, promise, threaten, or doom, the person spoken to. In the third person also whether singular or plural, as when we say, *he, she, or it shall*, or *they shall*, the speaker appears as a person of distinction or authority; for in this style he either prophesies, promises, or threatens. And in both persons a question may be put. *Shalt thou? Shall ye? Shall he, she, or it? Shall they?*

But *will* in the second and third persons, whether singular or plural, confers no such preeminence upon the speaker; for in saying *thou wilt*, or *ye will*, the speaker only intimates his own persuasion concerning the present disposition, or future conduct of another: and in saying *he, she, it will* or *they will*, either draws an inference, in the way of reasoning, from what hath been promised; or expresses his hopes or fears concerning what may arise from the disposition nature, or state of beings, whether living or inanimate, which come under his present consideration.—Questions are also propos'd by *will* in the second and third persons; *Wilt thou? Will ye? Will he, she, or it? Will they?*—But they differ in this from those proposed by *shall*: *Shall* asks with reference to the will of another, concerning what may, or may not happen, just as that will permits; whereas *will* inquires about the event, as flowing from, and depending upon, not the will of the person to whom the inquiry is addressed, but the inclination or nature of the person or thing itself, concerning wham the inquiry is made.

No. 72

The distinct manner in which we have taken notice of the first and second futures, will render it less needful to say much about the third and fourth; for what hath been observed concerning the first, whose sign is *shall*, will be found in a great measure applicable to the third, whose sign is *shall have*; and the remarks made on the second, whose sign is *will*, tend clearly in some degree to determine the force and meaning of the fourth, whose sign is *will have*.

Besides, as the third and fourth futures occur but seldom, especially in poetical works, from whence we have chosen principally to select our examples;

I shall but just give you an instance of each, adding to them such observations as may be pertinent.

... And Shakespeare expresses himself in the fourth future, thus.

When that he calls for a drink,
I'll have prepared him a chalice
 for the nonce; where-upon but
 sipping, if he by chace escape
 your venom'd tuck, our purpose
 may hold there.

On this passage, let it be observed, in the first place, that, in English, we frequently substitute the *present* of the indicative, instead of the *first future*, and the *second past tense* of the indicative, instead of the *third future*; and that this substitution is generally made by us, whenever we use the adverb of time *when* (which refers either to time past, present, or future), in its future tense: or employ any of the conditional conjunctions; or after a supposition.

Thus, in the present passage, the expression *when that he calls for a drink*, has plainly a reference to the future, and means, *when he shall call for a drink*. The present tense, therefore, is here substituted, after *when*, instead of the *first future*.

And that the *second past tense* may, after *when*, supply the place of the *third future*, will appear from this passage of *Dryden*.

His faithful friends, our jealousies and fears call Jebusites,
 and Pharaoh's pensioners; whom
when our fury from his aid *has*
 torn, he shall be naked left to
 public scorn.

Here the expression, *whom when our fury from his aid has torn*, plainly repeats future action, and is equivalent to *whom when our fury shall have torn from his aid*.

So with respect to the conditional conjunctions, let *till* and *if* be instances.

Here on my knee I vow to God above,
 I'll never pause again, never
 stand still;

Till either death *hath closed* (i. e.
shall have closed.) these eyes
 of mine, or fortune given me
 measure of revenge.

Shakespeare.

Well niece, I hope to see you one
 day fitted with a husband.
 Not till God make (i. e. shall make)
 man of some other metal than
 earth.

Shakespeare.

(White, 1761, págs. 92-113.)

(From: *An Essay on Grammar*, by William Ward)

Will denotes a future state, which some person determines concerning himself, but a state which he only foresees, believes, hopes, fears, supposes, or is told concerning other persons or objects.

Shall denotes a future state which some person only foresees, believes, hopes, fears, supposes, or is told, concerning himself; but a state which he determines concerning other persons or objects. In sentences used on common occasions, if no mention is made of the person who determines the future state, or of him who foresees, believes, etc. such state; this person is understood to be the same who speaks each sentence, and who of consequence himself, singly, or united with others, bears the first person. Therefore the sentences, *I — we will go, you — he — they shall stay*, are equivalent to, *I — we who speak determine to go, I — we who speak determine that you — he — they estay*. But the sentences, *I — we shall go, you — he — they will stay*, are equivalent to, *I — we who speak foresee, hope, fear, etc. our going, and, your — his — their staying*.

In compound sentences, if the words, *it is determined — decreed — resolved*, or other words of like import, be actually mentioned in connection with a sentence containing a future state, the form by *shall* is always used; as, *it is determined, ordainer, etc. that I — we — he — you — they shall succeed*. In compound sentences, if a person is represented as determining or fixing his own future state, *will* is used; if the future state of other persons or objects, *shall* is used.

As, *I determine that I will go — that you — he — they shall stay. John determines — resolves that he will go — that you — James, or any other person, shall stay*.

If in such sentences a person is represented as foreseeing, believing, fearing, hoping, supposing, his own future state; or declaring what he is told of it, *shall* is used; if as foreseeing, believing, etc. or as declaring what he is told of the future state of others, *will* is used; as, *I foresee — fear — hope — am told, etc. that I shall go that you — he — they will stay, John foresees — fears — hopes — is told, etc. that he shall go — that you — James, or any other person or object, but himself and I will stay*.

Hence these rules follow for the consistent application of *will* and *shall*.

1. If the person who is represented as declaring a future state, or as having his thoughts declared, is both himself in the state, and likewise deter-

mines it; or if he is neither himself in the state, nor determines it, *will* is used.

As, *I will go — you say you will stay — John determines — resolves he will return.* Here *I — you* and *John*, each declares a state which he himself is in, and also determines.

The stone will fall — John says that James will be undone, or, *John believes — hopes — is told*, etc. that *James will be undone*, here, *I*, who make the declaration concerning the stone, am neither in the state, *will fall*, nor determine it; and *John*, who is represented as making the declaration, or having his thoughts declared concerning *James*, is neither in the state, *will be undone*, nor determines it.

2. If the person who is represented as making a declaration, or as having his thoughts declared, concerning a future state, is either himself in it, but does not determine it, or is not himself in it, but does determine it, *shall* is used.

As, *I shall go — you say that you shall stay — John fears that he shall be undone.*

Here *I — you* and *John*, are each in the future states which themselves are represented as declaring, or as those whose thoughts are declared; but they do not themselves determine the states, but some other person, or the course of things does it.

You shall go — you say that he shall stay — John determines that James shall be undone.

Here *I*, who make the declaration concerning *you*, am not in the state *shall go*, but *I* determine it; *you*, who make the declaration concerning *him*, are not in the state *shall stay*; but *you* determine it; and *John*, whose determination is declared concerning *James*, is not in the state *shall be undone*, but he determines it.

These rules account for the change of signs, when two persons repeat the same thing with regard to future states. Thus my friend comes to me, and says, *you will be punished*; if I tell this to another person, I do it in these words, *my friend tells me that I shall be punished*. The reason of this is, that my friend is not himself in the future state, but I am, and we neither of us determine it; therefore he expresses a future state, which he is neither in, nor determines by *will*; but I am in it, and do not determine it, therefore I express it by *shall*. Had the magistrate, who determines the state, declared it to me, the words would have been, *you shall be punished*; because he determines the state, and is not in it. If I tell these words again, I still say, *the magistrate tells me that I shall be punished*; for I am in the state as I was before, and do not determine it any more than I did before. (Ward, 1765, páginas 198-203).

[The following excerpt from Ward's, *An Essay on Grammar* is quoted from Fries (1925, pág. 975) who reportedly found the material in a 1767 edition.]

When questions are asked, *shall* denotes a state which the person of whom the question is asked foresees concerning himself, but *determines* concerning

other objects; *will* a state which he determines concerning himself, but foresees concerning others: therefore *shall you go?* is equivalent to *do you expect to go?* but *will you go?* to *do you resolve or determine to go?* But *shall I, he, they go?* are equivalent to *do you determine that I, he, they may go?* or *do you permit us to go?* and *will I, the they go?* to *do you think or believe that I, he, they are determined to go?* or, in such a situation as that *our, his, or their going is likely to take place?* In suppositions it is often immaterial whether we use *shall* or *will*, or mention the verb without any sign; as, *I will meet you if my business shall permit me;* or, *if my business permit me to do it.*

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