

The future indicative as an expression of general truth in European Portuguese

Riccardo Giomi

University of Amsterdam

1 Introduction

This squib discusses the so-called gnomic use of the future indicative in European Portuguese. It represents a follow-up to the chapter I contributed to Gregersen & Hengeveld (forthc.), a volume that collects the results of the project *Habituals* (Amsterdam Center for Language and Communication), coordinated by Kees Hengeveld.

Adopting the theoretical perspective of Functional Discourse Grammar (henceforth FDG; Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008), the project focused on habituality “proper”, defined as “unbounded repetition of an event or situation that typically occurs”. Gnomic futures (e.g. English *Boys will be boys*) express the notion of general or universal truth, and as such are not habitual markers in a strict sense; however, as I know that Kees is particularly interested in the broader notion of pluractionality/verbal quantification, I am hoping that he will be pleased to find a paper on this particular topic in a *Festschrift* in his honour.

The paper is organized as follows. In Section 2 I briefly introduce the relevant theoretical tenets of FDG and the methodology developed in Gregersen & Hengeveld (forthc.); in Section 3 I apply this methodology to the Portuguese gnomic future; some brief conclusions are presented in Section 4.

2 Verbal quantification and semantic scope in FDG

One of the central ideas of FDG is that not only syntax, morphology and phonology but also semantics and pragmatics are hierarchically organized in a series of layers recursively embedded within one another. As regards semantics, the layers that make up the Representational Level of FDG are represented in (1) and may be defined as follows (see Hengeveld & Mackenzie 2008: Chapter 3):

- (1) (Propositional Content (Episode (State-of-Affairs (Situational Property
(Lexical Property)))))

Propositional Contents are mental constructs that only exist in the mind of language users and may be evaluated in terms of their truth or falsehood; *Episodes* are thematically coherent sets of (one or more) *States-of-Affairs*, i.e. events; the *Situational Property* represents the nuclear predication that characterizes a given State-of-Affairs, that is, it consists of a predicate and all its arguments; finally, *Lexical Properties* are abstract concepts that only exist in relation to some other entity, for instance the sheer notion of an action, process or state denoted by a lexical predicate.

In Gregersen & Hengeveld (forthc.), the notion of verbal quantification is split into five more discrete categories:

- (a) Genericity at the layer of the Propositional Content: The propositional content is always true.
- (b) Habituality at the layer of the Episode: The series of States-of-Affairs constituting the Episode occurs regularly.
- (c) Habituality at the layer of the State of Affairs: An individual State of Affairs occurs regularly.
- (d) Habituality at the layer of the Situational Property: A certain type of State of Affairs occurs regularly due to a propensity of a specific animate participant involved.
- (e) Multiplicativity at the layer of the Lexical Property: A single State-of-Affairs can be subdivided into several identical subparts.

Only meanings (b)–(d) are regarded as habitual categories proper. In the chapters on specific languages included in Gregersen & Hengeveld (forthc.), the semantic scope of constructions that express one or more of these meanings is determined on the basis of their distribution with respect to different (i) lexical modifiers, (ii) grammatical operators and (iii) complement-taking predicates. The rationale behind these tests is that, since the layers that make up the Representational Level denote different ontological categories, the types of lexical and grammatical specifications relevant to each layer must also be different. For instance, in accordance with the above definition of Propositional Content, adverbials expressing the speaker's commitment to the truth of a proposition (e.g. *probably*, *certainly*) function as modifiers of this particular layer; likewise, operators of the Propositional Content are grammatical expressions of epistemic modality and inferential evidentiality (e.g. the relevant

use of English *must*). Finally, cognitive predicates such as *think* or *believe* take a Propositional Content as their second argument, as demonstrated by the fact that the above-mentioned modifiers and operators are allowed within the complement of such predicates, as in (2), but not within that of an episode-oriented predicate like *happen*, which concerns the factual status of the event(s) described rather than the speaker's propositional attitude, cf. (3). That the argument of *happen* is indeed an Episode, by contrast, is demonstrated by the occurrence in its complement of operators and modifiers of this layer, such as the tense and time-location specifications expressed by the verb form *left* and the adverbial *on a Sunday*.

(2) *The plain man thinks that material objects must certainly exist, since they are evident to the senses.* (Bertrand Russell, *What is the Soul?*, 1928)

(3) *It so happened that he (*certainly) (*must have) left on a Sunday.*

In short, by checking whether a given grammatical construction occurs within the scope of different types of modifiers, operators and predicates or, the other way round, takes such expressions within its scope, it is possible to determine to which semantic layer the construction belongs. In the next section, these tests are applied to the gnomic use of the European Portuguese future indicative, which was not done systematically in Giomi (forthcoming) because its meaning fits the definition in (a) rather than (b)–(d), i.e. it does not function as a habitual operator *sensu stricto*.

3 Genericity in European Portuguese: the gnomic future

To start with modifiers, when those of the Propositional Content combine with the gnomic future it is often hard to be certain whether it is the modifier or the sense of universal truth expressed by the future tense that has the higher scope. Both interpretations are illustrated by the two paraphrases provided below the translation of (4):

- (4) *Quem tem valor e não se quiser aliar*
 who has value and NEG REFL want.SBJV.FUT.3.SG ally.INF
a uma seita deste tipo [...] certamente será
 to a sect of.this type certainly COP.IND.FUT.3.SG
sempre preterido em favor de outro que tenha
 always gone_past in favour of other REL have.SBJV.PRS.3.SG
as costas quentes.
 the back hot

‘A person of value, and who is not willing to join such a sect, will surely be passed over in favour of someone with friends in high places.’ (Corpus do Português: Web/Dialects)

“it is universally the case that a person of value [...] is certainly passed over in favour of someone with friends in high places”; or “it certainly is universally the case that a person of value [...] is passed over in favour of someone with friends in high places”

If only the latter interpretation was available, i.e. one in which the epistemic modifier *certamente* scopes over the universal-truth meaning expressed by the gnomic future, then this operator could in principle apply either to the Propositional Content or to any lower layer. But the possibility of the alternative interpretation, where universal truth ranks higher than the epistemic modifier in the semantic hierarchy, strongly suggests that the Propositional Content is indeed the layer to which the operator belongs. From a theoretical viewpoint, the availability of both interpretations is of particular interest because it suggests that, while layer-internal hierarchies of operators and modifiers certainly exist (see Mackenzie 2014), they might not be as rigid as hierarchies operating across layers have been widely proven to be in the FDG literature (cf. Giomi 2023: 137–138).

Given its meaning of general/universal truth, the gnomic future is logically excluded from the scope of the most prominent modifiers of the Episode layer, that is, temporal modifiers denoting a unique (i.e. non-recurring) time interval. (Indeed, the semantics of gnomic futures has also been characterized as “atemporal”, “omnitemporal” and “eternal truth”, see Fleischman 1982.) On the other hand, it is worth stressing that the gnomic future almost invariably cooccurs with one of the two universal temporal quantifiers *sempre*, ‘always’ (see (4)) and *nunca*, ‘never’ (Giomi 2010, 2017). While this might indicate that the grammaticalization of the Genericity operator is not complete yet, I believe that it is also possible to interpret *sempre* and *nunca* as unique-time adverbials denoting a time interval that corresponds to the whole timeline and to a non-existing point in time, respectively. In these combinations, it is the general truth operator that scopes over the modifier, as one would expect

if indeed the operator applies to the Propositional Content layer. This is illustrated in (5) (which is actually the same passage as (4), but now including the part omitted above): unlike with *certainly* in (4), a paraphrase like “it is never universally the case that ...” is obviously inadequate:

- (5) *Quem tem valor e não se quiser aliar a uma seita deste tipo,*
terá de suar muito mais, provavelmente
 have.IND.FUT.3.SG of sweat.INF much more probably
nunca chegará ao topo [...].
 never arrive.IND.FUT.3.SG to.the top
 ‘A person of value, and who is not willing to join such a sect, will have to work much harder [and] will probably never make it to the top.’
 (Corpus do Português: Web/Dialects)

Note that in (5) the gnomic future also combines with the modal *ter de*, which in this case functions as an event-oriented dynamic necessity operator on the State-of-Affairs (i.e. it makes reference to some participant-external circumstances that impose the realization of the event). Once again, it is clearly the sense of general truth that scopes over this operator and not the other way round, cf. the inadequacy of a paraphrase like “it has to be universally the case that...”. Importantly, the same goes for (6), where the gnomic future cooccurs with the evaluative deontic modal *ter que*:

- (6) *[...] a vida humana é inviolável, por isso terá*
 the life human is inviolable for this have.IND.FUT.3.SG
sempre que existir penalização para quem matar
 always to exist.INF punishment for who kill.SBJV.FUT.3.SG
ou ajudar a matar.
 or help.SBJV.FUT.3.SG to kill.INF
 ‘... human life is inviolable, therefore there will always have to be a punishment for those who commit or help to commit murder.’
 (Corpus do Português: Web/Dialects)

While event-oriented deontic modality refers to objective legal or social regulations or conventions, *ter que* in (6) expresses the speaker’s subjective evaluation that an event is morally obligatory. This type of deontic modality applies to the Episode layer (Olbertz & Gasparini Bastos 2013), hence the fact that it falls within the scope of the gnomic future concurs with the previous examples in placing the Genericity operator at the layer of Propositional Contents.

Finally, this conclusion is also supported by the occurrence of the gnomic future in embedded clauses. As shown in (7), it can be found in the complement of cognitive predicates, both verbal and nominal, like *considerar* in (7a) and *ilusões* in (7b):

- (7) a. *O antigo futebolista Luís Figo considera que será*
 the former footballer Luís Figo considers that COP.IND.FUT.3.SG
sempre injusto comparar Cristiano Ronaldo com Lionel
 always unfair compare.INF Cristiano Ronaldo with Lionel
Messi [...].
 Messi
 ‘Former football player Luís Figo argues that it will always be unfair to compare Cristian Ronaldo to Lionel Messi.’ (<https://expresso.pt>)
- b. *[...] não pode haver “ilusões” de que os*
 NEG can.PRS.3.SG EXIST.INF illusions of that the
bancos centrais andarão sempre a tentar apanhar
 banks central.PL FREQ.IND.FUT.3.PL always at try.INF grab.INF
os mercados.
 the markets
 ‘... there cannot be illusions that the central banks will always be trying to go after the markets.’ (<https://www.publico.pt>)

By contrast, in *Corpus do português* (Davies 2016) I could not find a single occurrence of the gnomic future in the complement of predicates that take as their argument an Episode (factive and reality-status predicates), State-of-Affairs (perception and volition predicates) or Situational Property (e.g. phasal-aspect and conative predicates). Once again, this finding is consistent with the above evidence, as it logically follows from the hypothesis that the Genericity operator applies to the Propositional Content.

4 Conclusions

By applying the scope tests developed in Gregersen & Hengeveld (forthc.), this squib has shown that the European Portuguese gnomic future is adequately characterized as a Genericity operator at the layer of Propositional Contents. On the one hand, this concurs with the pre-theoretical intuition that this use of the future indicative expresses a meaning of general truth, on the other, it lends support to the classification of pluractional categories proposed by the *Habituals* project and the methodology of semantic analysis that is characteristic of FDG.

Uncommon abbreviations

EXIST	existential
FREQ	frequentative

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