

On the Unavailability of (some) Future-of-Past Readings

It is commonly assumed that *would* is the past of *will*: according to this view, *will* spells out the combination of an abstract morpheme, WOLL, with the present tense; *would* spells out the combination of WOLL with the past. If we assume a standard theory of tense, this view predicts that *would* should give rise to future-of-past readings in matrix clauses. This prediction is not borne out: in matrix clauses, *would* is just odd. In this talk I will show that this pattern is pervasive crosslinguistically. I will explore a few analytical alternatives to explain the *would*-puzzle, and discuss their shortcomings. I will then sketch a competition-based approach, where *would*-sentences pragmatically compete with *will*- and *past*-sentences. I highlight the benefits of adopting this strategy, and the challenges of implementing it using existing tools.