

## On the Characteristic Interpretation of Sentences with *Will*

Keiko Sugiyama

In this study, I will deal with a type of interpretation of sentences with *will* (henceforth, modal sentences) like the one given to (1a,b).

(1) a. Pigs will eat anything. (Palmer 1990)

b. She'll go all day without eating. (Leech 1987)

According to Palmer (1990) and Leech (1987), the *will*'s in (1) express a power or volition of pigs and a habit of *she*, respectively. In these ways, (1) can all be interpreted as expressing subject's presently-held characteristics like their simple-present counterparts. I will refer to this type of interpretation of modal sentences as "characteristic interpretation" (C-interpretation) and refer to simple-present sentences expressing subject's characteristics as "characterizing sentences" (C-sentences) (cf. Krifka et al. (1995)). The purpose of this study is to examine what types of C-sentence can yield a C-interpretation when accompanied by *will*. I will not discuss here what makes modal sentences allowing a C-interpretation different in meaning from their parallel C-sentences.

Let us consider the following examples. As for the C-sentences in (2), they can yield a C-interpretation when accompanied by *will*. However, it is not the case with those in (3-5), as their modal counterparts in brackets show. (By the double cross I mean that the modal sentence marked with it cannot yield a C-interpretation; thus, it may yield other types of interpretation, for example, a prediction interpretation.)

- |                                      |  |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| (2) a. Accidents happen.             | (Accidents will happen.)                 |
| b. Babies are small.                 | (Babies will be small.)                  |
| c. Sons stand against their fathers. | (Sons will stand against their fathers.) |
| d. He speaks French at his work.     | (He will speak French at his work.)      |
| (3) a. He is blind.                  | (#He will be blind.)                     |
| b. He knows French.                  | (#He will know French.)                  |
| (4) a. Knowledge is power.           | (#Knowledge will be power.)              |
| b. Patience is a virtue.             | (#Patience will be a virtue.)            |
| (5) a. The sun rises in the east.    | (#The sun will rise in the east.)        |
| b. Men die.                          | (# Men will die.)                        |

The C-sentences in (2) are generally considered to be generic sentences, and so are the corresponding C-sentences of (1). A generic sentence contains at least either a "generic NP" in subject position or a "habitual predicate", and the entire sentence evokes unbounded number of situations of the same type (cf. Declerck 1986). The C-sentences in (1-2) all contain at least one of the two entities and they can evoke unbounded number of situations of the same time.

In contrast to the C-sentences in (1-2), those in (3), which describe a state concerning an individual, evoke only a single situation. I claim that the unacceptability under the C-interpretation in (3) is attributable to the fact that they can only evoke a single situation. The same explanation also applies to the unacceptability in (4). The abstract nouns as subject hardly evoke more than individual as well as the subject NPs in (3); therefore, these C-sentences also evoke only one situation.

With respect to the C-sentences in (5), they evoke unbounded number of situations and are generally regarded as generic sentences. However, what makes them distinct from (1-2) is that they express omnitemporal matters; in other words, they make a statement that is valid at all times and do not allow for exceptions. As opposed to them, the C-sentences in (1-2) express a tendency, a generality or an assumed regularity. Hence, they allow for exceptions.

These observations reveal that C-sentences which can yield a characteristic interpretation when accompanied by *will* have the two properties: (a) they can evoke unbounded number of situations; (b) they describe a matter which allows for exceptions.

Last of all, let us consider the case where the C-sentences in (4a) and (5a) are accompanied by *always*, as shown in (6a,b).

(6) a. Knowledge is always power. (Knowledge will always be power.)

b. The sun always rises in the east. (The sun will always rise in the east.)

In this case the corresponding modal sentences can yield a C-interpretation unlike those in (4a) and (5a). The speakers of (6a,b) emphasize the subject's characteristics by claiming that the described situations are always realized under conditions such as *when getting into trouble* and *in the morning*. In such an utterance situation, there should be a person who does not take the described matter to be established as a fact. I claim that the acceptability of modal counterparts of (6a,b) is attributable to the existence of *always* in (6a,b). In the case of (6a), *always* makes the hearer entertain more than one situation. In this respect, (6a) holds the property (a), which (4a) lacks. As for (6b), *always* makes the hearer assume that there should be some person who questions the truth of (5b) in the utterance situation. In this respect, (6b) holds the property (b) that (5b) lacks.

#### Selected References

- Declerck, R. (1986) "The Manifold Interpretations of Generic Sentences," *Lingua* 68, 149-188./Krifka, M. et al. (1995) "Genericity: An Introduction," *The Generic Book*, ed. by Carlson, G. and F. Pelletier, 1-124, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago./Leech, G. (1987) *Meaning and the English Verb* (2nd edition), Longman, London./Palmer, F. (1990) *Modality and the English Modals* (2nd edition), Longman, London.