Evidential restrictions of *must* and *will*

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*Must* and present tense interpretations of *will* can be used to mark that the speaker has inferential evidence for the embedded proposition. In (1), Dave infers that Lindsay is at work right now based on his knowledge of her schedule and current time. In this case, he can felicitously use either *will* or *must*.

(1)  
Context: Dave knows that Lindsay usually works at 6pm. It’s 6pm and Jenny asks where Lindsay is. Dave responds:

  a. Lindsay’ll be at work right now.
  b. Lindsay must be at work right now.

The evidential properties of *must* has received attention in the literature lately (Stone 1994, von Fintel and Gillies 2007, Glass 2013, Rett 2014, Murray 2013). The goal of this paper is to describe how *will* and *must* differ. While *must* and *will* seem to be used interchangeably in some contexts, such as (1), this is not the case in all contexts. By varying the proposition embedded under the modals, we can see that *will* and *must* are not interchangeable. In (2), the speaker infers one of two proposition: (i) *That is the neighbors barbecuing* or (ii) *The neighbors are barbecuing*. The utterances that result from embedding proposition (i) under *must* and *will* can both be felicitously uttered in the context in (2). However, the utterance that results from embedding proposition (ii) under *must* is felicitous in (2), while the utterance that results from embedding proposition (ii) under *will* is infelicitous.

(2)  
Your neighbors got a new barbecue last week and have been cooking with it often. One night your friend is over and smells the barbecue.

  a. ✓That must be the neighbors barbecuing.
  b. ✓The neighbors must be barbecuing.
  c. ✓That’ll be the neighbors barbecuing.
  d. #The neighbors’ll be barbecuing.

In (3), the context is changed: instead of the speaker’s inference being based on a smell, the speaker infers the embedded proposition based on the neighbors’ habits and the current time. In this context, the utterances that result from embedding proposition (ii) *The neighbors are barbecuing* under *must* and *will* can both felicitously be uttered. In this context, the utterance that results from embedding *That is the neighbors barbecuing* under either *will* or *must* is infelicitous because there is no referent for *that*.

(3)  
Your neighbors have barbecues on Friday nights. It is Friday night and you are out of town, you say:

  a. #That must be the neighbors barbecuing.
  b. ✓The neighbors must be barbecuing.
  c. #That’ll be the neighbors barbecuing.
  d. ✓The neighbors’ll be barbecuing.

I show that *must* and *will* differ in the requirements they make on the speaker’s source of evidence, similar to evidential markers in evidential languages. *Must* allows for the speaker to have a wider range of evidence for the embedded propositions, whereas the use of *will* restricts the speaker to having a specific type of evidence for the embedded proposition. I show that once we take into account these evidential properties of *will* and *must*, along with an understanding of the anaphoric properties of *that* and the copular construction, the data in (2)–(3), among other asymmetries in the modals’ behaviors, are naturally accounted for.
References


