It would not be good... Canonical apprehensive structures in Vanuatu languages

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Introduction

- Time modality (also referred to as apprehensive or avertive) expresses an event as epistemically possible, but considered to be undesirable by the speaker.
- Time expressions typically occur in the following contexts:
  - Warning (be careful not to fall).
  - Negative purpose clauses (let something happen, out of fear that something might happen).
  - Complement clauses of verbs that fail (but, to be afraid). The meaning is often expressed by highly grammaticalized markers (Lichtenberk, 2016).

1. [Mangap-Mbula, Oceanic (PNG)]
   Goò bo
   "Careful, you might fall!" (Bugenhagen, 1989, 28)

2. [Toqahtqa, Oceanic (Solomon 1a)]
   (Qebo riki u adu qelo rasa)
   "Watch out! (lit. watch it) so that you don’t slip." (Lichtenberk, 2008, 1160)

Our project does not have dedicated apprehensive TAM markers (except Salha). However, it turned out that a specific structure was used canonically in apprehensive contexts through storyboard elicitation.

- This structure can be characterized as irr realis subject clauses of evaluative predicates – ICEPs.

ICEPs on Storyboard Data

In 2017, we ran 6 storyboards in five of our subject languages from Vanuatu, with four to ten speakers per language.

- The storyboards targeted specific TAM contexts but were not designed to elicit timitive structures.
- However, there were several contexts that prompted several speakers across all languages to produce a specific structure of the general shape it would not be good to do something or it would be bad to do something.
- All of these contexts can be described as timitive.

Example 1: The Woodchopper storyboard, Daakaka

These contexts are from TFS Working Group (2011).

- [But Mary says, “John, don’t chop wood in the dark!” You’ll drop some.]
  - [to vu ne ka ne-p te me tsemut ge tua ku mar kwy]
  - NEIG real good trans 3SG=pot come then mess piece one if pot fall block

- [In case (lit. it is bad that) wind had blown.] (AK1-018-01)
  - [to vu ne ka ne-p te me tsemut ge tua ku mar kwy]
  - NEIG real good trans 3SG=pot come then mess piece one if pot fall block

"Then when I get up to go the outhouse, I’ll trip over it."

Example 2: Bill vs. the Weather storyboard, Nafsan

These contexts are from Vonder Klock (2013).

Colleague: “Why did you bring an umbrella yesterday?”

Bill: “It might have been windy when I walked to work.”

Case (lit. it is bad that) wind had blown.

The timitive nature of ICEPs

- All the contexts in which ICEPs have been observed in our project data can be characterized as expressing epistemic modality and undesirability, the two hallmarks of timitive contexts.
- Those contexts in which some speakers produce ICEPs have prompted other speakers to produce structures involving either
  1. General expressions of epistemic possibility.
  2. Sentences introduced by I’m afraid that...

The second case is illustrated below with the example of frame 15 from the Festival storyboard (von Prince, 2018). Here, one boy asks his friend whether he will participate in the volleyball game the next day. His friend replies that he won’t play and goes on to explain that he hurt his finger. Two out of three Daakaka speakers produced an ICEP in this context (9). Several other speakers of Daakaka and other languages produced a structure such as the one from Dalkalaen shown in (8).

- It would not be good for me to play and for the ball to hit my wound, then it might bleed again.

Example 3: The Windchopper storyboard, Dalkalaen

Case (lit. it is bad that) wind had blown.

The canonical character of ICEPs

ICEPs are also found in a range of other languages, apparently primarily expressing deontic necessity and possibility.

(11) [Japanese]
   Tai-bento ni iku
   eat-even-if good
   “You may eat (lit. ‘it’s ok even if you eat’).” (Akitakusa, 1992)

(12) [Korean]
   i ch’ak-an an ili-ul-myon, an tor-i-ta
   this book-tor win read-comp-if useless
   “You have to read this book (lit. ‘If you don’t read this book, it’s not ok’).” (Kim, 1996)

(13) [Sto, Oceanic (PNG)]
   (Ma) i=ve te mine anda (ma) ara
   “She may/should do this.” (Lit. “If she does it, it’s good.”) (Bugenhagen, 1993)

Conclusions

- Besides grammatical morphemes, timitive meanings can also be expressed by ICEPs of a canonical nature.
- Timitive contexts are often expressed by ICEPs in all the languages of our study.
- ICEPs can express other modal notions.