Realis and irreals in Oceanic

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September 2019, ALT, Pavia
Realis and irrealis

“Realis”: referring to the actual past/present.
Definitions of irrealis:

- Cristofaro (2012): “unrealized states of affairs”
- Elliott (2000):
  - possible events;
  - conditionals;
  - events qualified by modality;
  - directives;
  - (negation)
  - (habitual aspect)
  - (questions)
The debate

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  • Its application to markers in different languages is too inconsistent to be meaningful.
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  - The concept has been said to be ill-defined.
  - Its application to markers in different languages is too inconsistent to be meaningful.

- Oceanic linguists generally agree that the realis/irrealis distinction is meaningful and useful in the context of Oceanic languages (Bugenhagen, 1993; Roberts, 1990; Elliott, 2000; Barbour, 2011; Lichtenberk, 2016).
Our argument

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- Certain irrealis functions, such as imperatives, prohibitives and negative purpose clauses (*lest*) are sometimes expressed by more specialized expressions, which block the use of an irrealis marker.
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- Certain irrealis functions, such as imperatives, prohibitives and negative purpose clauses (*lest*) are sometimes expressed by more specialized expressions, which block the use of an irrealis marker.

- The label *realis* is sometimes assigned to a form that is in fact neutral with respect to modality and tense.
Empirical methods

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• **Description-based** comparative work on 60 Oceanic languages so far.
Subdomains of irrealis in Oceanic: North Ambrym “irrealis”

(1) Jon, bone fō ktu, lo mwen-amrō teere nyer John time 2sg.IRR take then GEN.CL-2DL.POSS child PL e-ve lol.
POT-COP.IRR plenty “If you marry John, you will have many children.” (ib1-fortune-na.35)

compare von Prince et al. (2018)
Subdomains of irrealis in Oceanic: North Ambrym “counterfactual”

(2) ō to yene Adam lo mwena-mrō mane te
2SG CTF marry Adam then POSS.CL-2DL.POSS money NREC.PST
lam.
big
“If you had married Adam, you two would have been rich.”
(at1-fortune-na.24)
Subdomains of irrealis in Oceanic: Sinaugoro “irrealis”

(3) Bere b-e-re    daro-a    nai [tu], kurabo ḡitaḡita-na
    if   R-3SG-IRR sweep=3SG time TOP floor appearance-3SG
    b-e-r-e    namo.
    R-3SG-IRR good
    “If she had swept, the floor would have been clean.”
    (Tauberschmidt, 1999, 81)
The North Ambrym “irrealis” refers to the future;
The Sinaugoro “irrealis” refers to the counterfactual past/present, like the North Ambrym “counterfactual”.
The “irrealis” markers of the two languages do not overlap in meaning.
The realis/irrealis distinction is characterized by an asymmetry between the present/past vs. the future.

This asymmetry can be modelled by a branching-time framework (Prior, 1957; Thomason, 1970).
The actual, the counterfactual, and the possible

von Prince (2019) shows how branching time can generate a three-way distinction between modal domains.
Modal-temporal distinctions

Figure: Combining the modal with the temporal dimension allows for more fine-grained distinctions
“Irrealis” and counterfactual in North Ambrym and Sinaugoro

Figure: The “irrealis” in Sinaugoro (red) and in North Ambrym (orange)
Functions of irrealis

**Figure:** Functions of irrealis markers inspired by Bugenhagen (1993)
**Functional split of irrealis in Paamese**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>realis (zero-marked)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>distant future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immediate future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tentative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: TAM categories in Paamese, after **Crowley (1982)**; a similar system is found in South-East Ambrym (**Ridge, 2019**).
# Functional split of irrealis in Muyuw

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Marker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>past</td>
<td>realis/zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conditionals</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>want</em></td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>wish</em></td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ability</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>obligation</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>purpose</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>timitive</em></td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prohibitive</td>
<td>irrealis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>imperative</td>
<td>zero</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table:** TAM marking in Muyuw according to Bugenhagen (1993)
Interim

- Irrealis markers might be blocked from expressing certain functions by more specialized markers in the system.
- In the Oceanic context, this concerns in particular functions such as imperatives, prohibitives, timitives, as well as the immediate future.
“Realis” subject proclitics in Nafsan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Realis</th>
<th>Irrealis</th>
<th>Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1sg</td>
<td>a=</td>
<td>ka=</td>
<td>kai=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2sg</td>
<td>ku=</td>
<td>pa= [kpa]</td>
<td>kui=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3sg</td>
<td>i=</td>
<td>ke=</td>
<td>ki=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1dl (incl)</td>
<td>ta=</td>
<td>tak=</td>
<td>takai=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1dl (excl)</td>
<td>ra=</td>
<td>rak=</td>
<td>rakai=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2dl</td>
<td>ra=</td>
<td>rak=</td>
<td>rakai=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3dl</td>
<td>ra=</td>
<td>rak=</td>
<td>rakai=, rai=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pl (incl)</td>
<td>tu=</td>
<td>tuk=</td>
<td>tu=, tui=, tukoi=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1pl (excl)</td>
<td>u=</td>
<td>ko=</td>
<td>ui=, koi=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2pl</td>
<td>u=</td>
<td>ko=</td>
<td>koi=</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3pl</td>
<td>ru=</td>
<td>ruk=</td>
<td>rui=, rukui=</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table: Portmanteau subject proclitics in Nafsan based on Thieberger (2006)
The problem with Nafsan realis proclitics

(4) \( Ru=f \) to nigmam traus-i-Ø, ko=fo
3pl=cond hab 1pl.excl.ben tell-tr-3sg.obj 1pl.excl.irr=psp.irr tae, me gar i=tik.
know but 3pl 3sg=not
“If they had told it to us, we would know, but they didn’t.”
(Thieberger, 2006:259)
Our proposal

• The “realis” set of Nafsan subject proclitics is in fact neutral with respect to TAM (Krajinović, 2018).

• The interpretation of utterances unmarked for TAM as referring to the actual past or present is a pragmatic default (Smith et al., 2007; Mucha, 2012; von Prince, 2018).

• The same analysis can be applied to languages such as Wogeo (cf. Exter, 2012)
Conclusions

- Realis and irrealis are meaningful categories in Oceanic languages;
- Crosslinguistic mismatches can largely be accounted for by the following factors:
  - TAM markers labeled as *irrealis* might refer only to a modal-temporal subdomain of the irrealis domain.
  - Irrealis markers might be blocked from expressing certain functions by more specialized markers in the system.
  - Markers labeled as *realis* might in fact be neutral with respect to TAM and therefore occur in non-realis contexts.
Binary realis/irrealis systems
Non-overlapping modal-temporal domains

de Haan (2012): the “irrealis” in Limbu has no overlap with the “irrealis” in Hualapai.

(5) Limbu (Tibeto-Burman): counterfactual past/present
yan kɔtt-u-ŋ-gɔ:ni iŋ-u-ŋ-ba.
money have-3P-1SG.AG-IRR buy-3P-1SG.AG-IPF
“If only I had the money, I would buy it.”

(6) Hualapai (Pai, Yuman): immediate future
olo-h-ch ha: thi:-hi-k-wi
horse-DEM-SUB water 3/3.drink-IRR-SS-AUX/be
“The horse is going to drink the water.”
“Irrealis” in Limbu and Hualapai

Figure: Irrealis in Limbu (left): counterfactual past/present; irrealis in Hualapai (right): immediate future.


References II


References III


References IV


