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The pervasive reality status distinction in the grammar of Yamalero (Guahiban)

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What's this presentation about?

1 Is reality status (RS) a cross-linguistically valid category, i.e. different from modality?

2 Binary distinction between "realized" (realis, indicative) and "unrealized" (irrealis, subjunctive) situations

3 Yamalero seems to present a prototypical RS system used with negation, future, conditional, counterfactual, etc.

Contrast between RS uses in Yamalero

Past

waja-mone   *unu-tja*   *jinawana-p-a*
1INCL.POSS-group   forest-LOC   live-VC2-REAL
'Our people used to live in the forest'

Negation

apa-jinawana-p-e
NEG-live-VC2-IRR
'[Before, our people] didn't use to live well '

Future

jinawana-p-e-ena-tsi
live-VC2-IRR-FUT-1INCL.A/S$_a$
'[When we talk things properly] we will live well'

3

The Yamalero language

Vitality	**~300 speakers, but highly transmitted**
Location	**Colombian Llanos (mid-Orinoco region)**
Classification	**Guahiban language family**
Previous studies	**Short wordlists and literacy materials**

Methods & data

Fieldwork ~9 months between 2022 and 2024 (4 fieldtrips)

Corpus 11 hours of multi-genre naturalistic speech

Collection Transcribed and translated by native speakers

Analysis Ongoing morphosyntactic tagging with FLEx

Outline

2. The reality status debate

Notional definition of realis and irrealis

Realis

The realis portrays situations as actualized, as having occurred or actually occurring, knowable through direct perception.

Irrealis

The irrealis portrays situations as purely within the realm of thought, knowable only through imagination.

Arguments against the validity of the RS category

1 **Considerable semantic heterogeneity: notionally diverse sets of modal meanings (modal multifunctionality)**

2 **Lack of a binary distinction obligatorily marked (in all major construction types of a language)**

3 **Languages have different putative "irrealis" markers for different unrealized event types**

Bybee et al. 1994, Bybee 1998, Palmer 2001, Cristofaro 2012, de Haan 2012   9

Different unrealized event types

1 **Not-yet-realized situations** (**futures, conditions, wishes, directives, etc.**)

2 **Situations that fail to be realized in the past** (**negation, counterfactuals, unfulfilled obligations, etc.**)

Cristofaro 2012

3. The Yamalero RS system

Yamalero's reality status system

1 **Obligatory verbal inflectional category marked in virtually all morphosyntactic environments**

2 **Realis and irrealis marking patterns in accordance with the notional definitions of realis and irrealis**

3 **Joint RS system co-occurring with other grammatical categories (negation, future, potential, etc.)**

Consistent with Givón 1994, Mithun 1995, Elliot 2000, Michael 2014

Joint system vs non-joint systems

Mauri & Sansò 2016: 184

Joint system

"Irrealis morpheme co-occurs with another morpheme which encodes a specific subtype of unactualized meaning"

Non-joint

"Irrealis morphemes do not need other morphemes to express a more or less wide range of unactualized meanings"

Reality status morphemes

	Realis	Irrealis
Class 1-4	*-a*	*-e*
Class 5-8	*-a*	*-i*
Class 9	*-ane*	*-e*

Obligatory marking

Slot +2

Except for: (i) defective verbs, and (ii) class 5 verbs in imperative

Semantic parameters of the RS system

Parameter	Realis	Irrealis	Joint marking
Polarity	Positive	Negative	*apa-* 'NEG'
Temporal reference	Non-future	Future	*-ena* 'FUT'
Hypotheticality	Actual	Potential, conditional, counterfactual, frustrative	*-tsipa* 'POT', *ta-* 'FRUS'
Sentential mood	Declarative	Volitive	*-jetsa* 'VOL'
Causation	Ø	Causative	*-xana* 'CAUS'
Prospectiveness	Ø	Purposive clause	*-jetsa, -nexa* 'PURP'

Negation

Irrealis

apa-pa-juna-w-i-n
NEG-PL-be.afraid.of-VC7-IRR-1A/S$_a$
'We were not afraid of them [the guerrilla]'

Realis

wawai　　　　*juna-w-a-iba*
white.people　　be.afraid.of-VC7-REAL-ITER
'The white people were afraid of him [my grandpa, a traditional healer]'

Future

Irrealis

axu   manbotja   yaput-e-ena   daxita
?   tomorrow   know-**IRR**-**FUT**   all
'Tomorrow [the kids] are going to know everything [the Meta river area]'

Realis

pe-bada-mone   yaput-ane
LINK-old-COLL   know-**REAL**
'The elders know'

Potential modality

Irrealis

ya-jani-p-e-tsipa
?-be.hungry-VC2-IRR-POT
'He is able to stay hungry'

Realis

waxan   naxe jani-p-a-iba-tsi
1INCL.PRN now be.hungry-VC2-REAL-ITER-1INCL.A/S$_a$
'We used to be hungry'

Counterfactual and conditional

jinono-p-e-tsipa-tsi   *pepa   t-e-tsipa-tsi*
live-VC2-**IRR**-**POT**-1INCL.A/S$_a$ seed   see-**IRR**-**POT**-1INCL.A/S$_a$
'Had we lived there, we would still have seen seeds'

Frustrative modality

Irrealis

ta-*tü*-*p*-*e*   *no*
FRUS-die-VC2-IRR   EXCLAM
'I almost died [after I ran into a deer]'

Realis

daxita   dujai   ba-*tü*-*p*-*a*
all   animal HAB-die-VC2-REAL
'[During the dry season] all animals die'

Volitive mood

Irrealis

nonajai-tja   *naka-ka-x-e-jetsa*
chili-INST   1INCL.O/S$_o$-INST-eat-IRR-VOL
'[The spirits] want to eat you with chili pepper'

Realis

bajaya   *pa-x-ane-jü*
morning   PL-eat-REAL-1A/S$_a$
'In the morning we ate breakast'

Causatives

Irrealis

pe-tsebia   meda se-ts-i-xana-tsi
LINK-be.black water cook-VC6-IRR-CAUS-1INCL.A/S$_a$
'They make her prepare coffee (lit. 'black water')'

Realis

dujai se-t-a
fish   cook-VC6-REAL
'They cook fish [to celebrate the girl's first period]'

Purposive clauses

[manoko   *exa-n-**e**-**jetsa**-n]*
cassava.flour   make-VC1-**IRR**-**PURP**-1A/S$_a$

baxuotja   *ba-nünü-b-**a**-jü*
thats.why   HAB-sift-VC5-**REAL**-1A/S$_a$
'That's why I sift it [the manioc], to make the cassava flour'

4. Further uses of the irrealis

Agent nominalizations

tsidaja pe-yaput-e-mone   tajü   inaxe yeteji
FOC?   LINK-know-IRR-COLL   be.far now   be.nonexistent
'Those who knew (lit. 'the knowers') are far now, they are not among us'

Event nominalizations

Consecutive clauses

[*waja*-*idi*-*b*-*i*   *kuneje*] *tsitsi*-*b*-*a*-*tsi*
1INCL.POSS-grate-VC5-IRR after   sift-VC5-REAL-1INCL.A/S$_a$
'After grating it [the manioc], you sift it'

Temporal clauses

Causal clauses

Consecutive/resultative aspect

Irrealis

lincora   peka-kamo-k-e   pa-ida
incora   CONS-buy-VC3-IRR   DEM-land
'The INCORA consecuently bought this land'

Realis

incora-mone   ida   kamo-k-a
incora-COLL   land   buy-VC3-REAL
'The INCORA people were the ones who bought the land'

Class 9 verbs

1 **Reduced set**

2 **Highly frequent**

3 **Irregular**

x-ane	'eat'
ku-ane	'sew'
naw-ane	'swim'
mataw-ane	'bath'
t-ane	'see/look'
yaput-ane	'know/learn'
jumet-ane	'listen'
biet-ane	'scold'
yajiut-ane	'know'

Irrealis with class 9 verbs

Imperative

pe-bada-mone naka-jai   tsa-ibi   xanwetsa pa-t-e-ma
LINK-old-COLL 1INCL.O/S$_o$-say tsa-ITER be.good   PL-look-**IRR**-**IMP**
'The elders used to tell us 'be careful!' (lit. 'look well')'

Aspect

bajapokoneje   pe-ena   ko   x-e-xaba
after.that   LINK-mum EVD?   eat-**IRR**-**SMLF**
'Then they ate the mum'

Associated posture

ne-jumet-e-ya-eka
1O/S$_o$-listen-**IRR**-?-**SIT.SBJ**
'He is listening to me [sitting]'

5. Discussion and conclusions

The uses of the irrealis in Yamalero

1 **Negation, future, potential, conditional, counterfactual, frustrative, volitive, causative and prospective clauses pattern with the notional definition of irrealis**

2 **Also for nominalizations and consecutive aspect (?)**

3 **Class 9 verbs also use if for imperative and for typically realis domains, such as aspect and associated posture**

Reality status as a relevant category for Yamalero

1 **The notions of "realis" and "irrealis" play crucial roles in understanding the behavior of this inflectional system**

2 **The binary inflectional contrast is obligatory marked on virtually all major morphosyntactic constructions**

3 **RS is systematically marked by the same morphemes:**

***-a/-ane* for realis and *-e/-i* for irrealis**

Semantically superordinate category

1 **Covers a wide range of irrealis notional domains, including Cristofaro's "not-yet-realized" vs "failed" situations**

2 **Includes non-modal notional domains such as negation or future**

3 **The use of irrealis morphemes with non-irrealis meanings is residual (nominalizations and class 9 verbs)**

Formally superordinate category

1 **Joint system that requires the presence of another morpheme alongside the irrealis marker**

2 **Constructions with irrealis and no further marking are barely non-existent (avoiding "the ambiguity problem")**

3 **Irrealis marking can co-occur with modal categories such as potential, conditional, counterfactual and frustrative**

Thank you so much for listening!

Happy to receive questions and feedback :)