

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

Kilu von Prince¹, Ana Krajinović^{1,2}, Manfred Krifka^{1,3}, Valérie Guérin⁴ and Michael Franjeh⁵

¹Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, ²University of Melbourne, ³Leibniz-Zentrum Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft (ZAS), ⁴James Cook University, ⁵SMG, University of Surrey
 kilu.von.prince@hu-berlin.de, krajinoa@hu-berlin.de
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Introduction

- ▶ Timitive modality (also referred to as *apprehensive* or *avertive*) expresses that an event is **epistemically possible**, but considered to be **undesirable** by the speaker.
 - ▶ Timitive expressions typically occur in the following contexts:
 - ▶ Warnings (*be careful not to fall*),
 - ▶ Negative purpose clauses (*lest something happen, out of fear that something might happen*),
 - ▶ complement clauses of verbs such as *fear (that)*, *be afraid (that)*.
 - ▶ In Oceanic languages, this meaning is often expressed by highly grammaticalized markers (Lichtenberk, 2016).
- (1) [Mangap-Mbula, Oceanic (PNG)]
 Go=**bo** soi!
 2SG.SBJ=APPR fall
 “Careful, you might fall!” (Bugenhagen, 1989, 28)
- (2) [Toqabaqita, Oceanic (Solomon Is.)]
 Qoko riki-a **ada** goko rusu.
 2SG.SEQ watch-3.OBJ TIM 2SG.SEQ slip
 “Watch out (lit.: watch it) so that you don’t slip.” (Lichtenberk, 2008, 1160)
- ▶ Our project languages do not have dedicated timitive TAM markers (except Saliba).
 - ▶ However, we found that a specific structure was used canonically in timitive contexts through storyboard elicitations.
 - ▶ This structure can be characterized as *irrealis subject clauses of evaluative predicates*—ICEPs.

The MelaTAMP project



- ▶ We investigate TAM systems ...
- ▶ ...in seven Oceanic languages ...
- ▶ ...of Melanesia (Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea) ...
- ▶ primarily based on **corpus data** and **storyboard elicitations**.

ICEPs in Storyboard Data

- ▶ In 2017, we ran a set of 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 if/COMP* or *it would be bad if/COMP*...
- ▶ 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 go chop wood in the dark!” You’ll drop some.”

(3) [to vu ne ko=p me] te mestem gur tuswa ka we mur kyu
 NEG.REAL good TRANS 2SG=POT come then miss piece one.IRR if POT fall block
 seli=ne em kekei.
 way=TRANS house small

“You might let a piece [of wood] fall down so that it blocks the way to the outhouse.” (lit. “it’s not good if you let a piece [of wood] fall down...”)



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

(4) Te [to vu ne ka na=p tewilya] te ka na=p mur vyan yen wye.
 then NEG.REAL good TRANS if 1SG=POT stumble then if 1SG=POT fall go in water
 “I might stumble and fall into the water” (lit. “It’s not good if I stumble...”)

Example 2: Bill vs. the Weather storyboard, Nafsan

These contexts are from Vander Kloek (2013).



Colleague: “Why did you bring an umbrella yesterday?”
 Bill: “It might have rained when I walked to work.”

(5) I=trau, i=saa kin ka=mai pak nawesien me uus ke=wo.
 3SG=really 3SG.REAL=bad COMP 1SG.IRR=come go.to work and rain 3SG.IRR=rain
 “In case (lit. it is bad that) I was coming to work and it rained.” (AK1-018-01)



Colleague: “Why did you bring a hat yesterday?”
 Bill: “It might have been windy when I walked to work.”

(6) I=saa kin nlag ke=sisi.
 3SG.REAL=bad COMP 3SG.IRR=blow
 “In case (lit. it is bad that) wind had blown.” (AK1-018-01)

Canonical character of ICEPs

Several contexts prompted several speakers from some or each of the subject languages to produce ICEPs, in particular frames 6-8 of the Woodchopper storyboard. Two of the most productive contexts for ICEPs are shown in the following tables. In both cases, speakers usually produced sequences of up to four ICEPs.

Woodchopper 6-8:

Language	+	Total
Nord Ambrym	3	5
Daakaka	2	4
Dalkalaen	2	4
Mavea	1	5
Nafsan	1	5
Total	9	24

Bill and the weather 18, 20

Language	+	Total
Nord Ambrym	0	5
Dalkalaen	0	3
Mavea	0	3
Daakaka	1	5
Nafsan	3	5
Total	4	22

ICEPs in the corpora

- ▶ After our observations from the storyboard data, we also found ICEPs in the corpora.
- ▶ But the instances were too few to detect a clear pattern.

The following example is from Daakaka. In the story, the sentence is uttered by a person who wants to trick a magical creature into swallowing a hot stone.

(7) [to vu ne] ka na=n te ne venek te
 NEG.REAL good TRANS COMP 1SG=NEG.POT cut NEG.POT come DISC
 kaa-kilye bwilinp-am
 bend-res.miss opening.of.mouth-2.POSS
 “I’m afraid I might cut it and then miss your open mouth” (lit “it’s not good if...”)

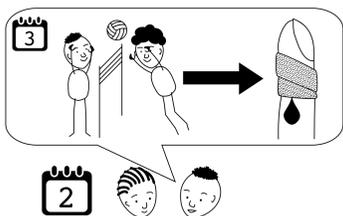
Another example comes from the Nafsan corpus (Thieberger, 2006). The speaker is afraid they might get something wrong. In the context, this sentence might also be translated as *I might say something wrong in our cassette*.

Context: *And I think that this small story is all that I can tell. But if I go further I might make a wrong turn.*

(8) go i=saa kin ka=fo psir emrom ni kaset gakite
 and 3SG=bad COMP 1SG.IRR=PSP.IRR lie inside of cassette 1PL.IN.POSS
 “And it is bad if I lie in our cassette.” (Thieberger, 2006, 120.010)

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, or
 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 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 (10).

(9) [to vu ne] ka na=n vyan ple, te bol ne syu ne s-ok myanok te bura ka
 NEG.REAL good TRANS COMP 1SG=NEG.POT go play then ball NEG.POT hit TRANS CL3-1SG.POSS wound then blood ASR
 we kuo tetes.
 POT run again
 “It’s not good for me to play and for the ball to hit my wound, then it might bleed again.”

(10) [al-uk mwe nek] en nga nga ba na ple ale bol ba bo so lon ver-ak lo ba mae ba be meda
 skin.of-1SG.POSS REAL fear DEF 3SG FOC POT 1SG play then ball hit on hand.of-1SG.POSS then POT make POT IRR bleed
 “I’m afraid that if I played, the ball would hit my hand and make it bleed [again].” (SB_Dalkalaen_Lafet_Belang032)

ICEPs as modal expressions in other languages

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

(11) [Japanese]

Tabete-temo ii.
 eat-even.if good
 “You may eat” (lit. “It’s ok even if you eat.”) (Akatsuka, 1992)

(12) [Korean]

i ch’aek-un an ilk-o-myon, an twe-n-ta
 this book-TOP NEG read-COMP-if NEG be.good-PRS-PRT
 “You **have to** read this book” (lit. “If you don’t read this book, it’s not ok.”) (Kim, 1986)

(13) [Sio, Oceanic (PNG)]

(Ma) i-veta mine ande (ma) ara
 IRR 3sg-do like:this then IRR good
 “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 character.
- ▶ Timitive contexts are often expressed by ICEPs in all the languages of our study.
- ▶ The ICEPs were not previously described as timitive for any of the languages.
- ▶ ICEPs can express other modal notions.

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