

## What do languages code when they code reality status?

Caterina Mauri\*, Andrea Sansò\*\*

\* Università di Pavia

\*\* Università dell'Insubria, Como

### 1. Different views of (ir)realis and the irrealis debate<sup>1</sup>

There are at least two ways in which the terms *realis* and *irrealis* are used in grammatical theory. In a major strand of the literature on modality, mainly embodied in the works of Talmy Givón, the term 'irrealis' is used to refer to a 'mega-modality' subsuming a number of more specific 'sub-modes' which share a common denominator, i.e. epistemic uncertainty (Givón 1994: 267; Givón 2001: 308; see also Givón 1984: 285ff). This common denominator explains why there is often shared grammatical marking of the various irrealis sub-modes:

- (1) "intention, ability, preference, permission and obligation are all future projecting, and [...] the future is by definition an irrealis epistemic mode. The epistemic aspect of irrealis is thus its common denominator, to which an evaluative-deontic aspect may be added." (Givón 2001: 308)

In the literature on modality, and in the practice of grammar writing, the two terms *realis* and *irrealis* are also employed as descriptive equivalents of a number of moods traditionally labelled as 'indicative', 'subjunctive', 'optative', 'conditional', 'potential', etc. (see, e.g., Chung & Timberlake 1985: 241ff.; Timberlake 2007: 326ff.), i.e. they may also refer to **forms** encoding sub-domains of the complex realm of modality, their adoption being generally dependent on the lack of an established alternative grammatical terminology in a given language:

- (2) "After the unmarked mood – indicative or realis – and the imperative, it is not uncommon to distinguish another mood. It tends not to be used for any single realm of modality, but is an all-purpose mood used to express a range of less-than-completely real modality when the degree of irreality rises to some threshold. There is no single accepted name; traditions differ, and usage differs in different languages. The term subjunctive points to the fact this mood will commonly appear in embedded structures. Conditional points to one major function of marked modality, that of indicating contingency in explicit conditional structures. Potential covers a broad range of especially future possibilities. *When there is no established term in some tradition, irrealis is useful.*" (Timberlake 2007: 326; our emphasis)

In another tradition, the two terms are used to refer to two opposite values of a functional dimension which is not co-extensive with modality. Indeed, some authors speak of 'reality status' (or 'status') as a grammatical category to full right, realized differently in different languages, with at least two values: realis (or neutral) and irrealis (e.g. Foley & Van Valin 1984; Van Valin & LaPolla 1997: 40ff; Elliott 2000: 80). These two values are characterized in terms of actualization

---

<sup>1</sup> The papers collected in this special issue have been originally presented at a workshop with the same title which took place in Forlì within the 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the *Societas Linguistica Europaea* (17-20 September 2008). We wish to thank the SLE conference organizing committee, chaired by Michele Prandi, for accepting our workshop proposal with extraordinary enthusiasm, and the members of the program committee of the workshop (Kasper Boye, Isabelle Brill, Sonia Cristofaro, Ferdinand de Haan, Anna Giacalone, and Johan van der Auwera) for their help with the selection of papers. We also warmly thank Alexandra Aikhenvald, Gabriele Diewald, Roberta Facchinetti, Christian Lehmann, John Roberts, Mauro Tosco, and Jean-Christophe Verstraete, who agreed to serve as anonymous referees of the papers.



(6) Chalcatongo Mixtec (Oto-Manguan, Mixtecan; Macaulay 1996)<sup>2</sup>

- a. *rúʔú kee=rí nduči*    b. *rúʔú žee=rí nduči=rí*  
I eat[IRR]=1 beans    I eat[REAL]=1 beans=1  
“I will eat beans.”    “I’m eating my beans.”
- c. *rúʔú kútú=rí=nu baʔá*  
I work[IRR]=1=CTFC but  
“I was supposed to work, but...”

Elliott (2000) considers ‘reality status’ as a grammatical category distinct from modality. While the latter is concerned with the expression of the speaker’s attitudes towards a given SoA, reality status is seen as “the grammaticalized expression of location in either the real or some unreal world, its component contrasting terms being realis and irrealis” (Elliott 2000: 67). Interactions between the two domains are possible: for instance, just as in some languages tense and aspect are encoded through a single morphosyntactic system, it may be the case that modality and reality status are realized by the same system (Elliott 2000: 75). In other languages the two marking systems may be well differentiated, however. As it can be reconstructed from Elliott’s argumentation, this happens when a language has what Palmer (2001: 145) calls a *joint system* of reality status marking, i.e. a system in which (ir)realis marking co-occurs with other markers encoding specific modalities, as in the following example from Awtuw:

(7) Awtuw (Sepik, Ram; cited from Elliott 2000: 75)

*Awtiy yarow Liwmiy-e næ-w-æy-re*  
Awtiy tomorrow Lumi-LOC POT-IRR-go-FUT  
“Awtiy might go to Lumi tomorrow.”

The problem of how to differentiate between modality and reality status is approached somewhat differently in Role and Reference Grammar. In this approach *status* is conceived of as a functional layer distinct from modality and illocutionary force which has to do with “the variable of the actuality of the event, whether it has been realized or not” (Foley & Van Valin 1984: 213), including various sub-types of less-than-real meanings (“whether the action is necessary, or likely, or merely possible” Foley & Van Valin 1984: 213). Modality, on the other hand, “characterizes the speaker’s estimate of the relationship of the actor of the event to its accomplishment, whether he has the obligation, the intention, or the ability to perform it” (Foley & Van Valin 1984: 214). In other words, Role and Reference Grammar tries to solve the problem of the relationship between modality and reality status by assuming that status also encompasses epistemic modality, and by reducing modality to what others call *agent-oriented modality* (Bybee *et al.* 1994: 177). The difference between the two layers has mainly to do with their scope: modality is an operator at the core layer (i.e. it has the nucleus and its arguments in its scope), whereas the scope of status includes the entire proposition.

Glossing over the distinctions between Elliott’s approach and Role and Reference Grammar, Bybee’s well-known criticism of the irrealis notion (Bybee 1998: 264ff) is mostly levelled against the view of reality status as an independent grammatical category. In Bybee’s view, the conceptual domain of unreal events largely coincides with the functional domain of modality: when one looks at the language-specific behaviour of alleged irrealis markers one often comes across morphemes

---

<sup>2</sup> In Chalcatongo Mixtec verbs have two distinct stems, called realis and potential (= irrealis). The realis stem occurs in progressive, habitual, and stative forms. The potential stem is used to express future time, imperative, counterfactual, conditional and various other senses. The two types of stems may differ (i) segmentally (e.g. *kee* vs. *žee*, ‘eat<sub>[REALIS]</sub>’ vs. ‘eat<sub>[POTENTIAL]</sub>’); (ii) by tone (e.g. *kaku* vs. *kákú*, ‘be born<sub>[REALIS]</sub>’ vs. ‘be born<sub>[POTENTIAL]</sub>’); and (iii) segmentally and by tone (e.g. *xasú* vs. *kásu*, ‘close<sub>[REALIS]</sub>’ vs. ‘close<sub>[POTENTIAL]</sub>’).

that encode only a sub-set of unreal events; the semantic relations connecting the different uses of such morphemes do not significantly differ from the meaning relations connecting sub-functions within the functional domain of modality. Consider, for instance, the uses of the verbal suffix *-welak* in Lake Miwok:

- (7) Lake Miwok (Penutian, Utian, Miwok; Callaghan 1998: 229-230)
- |    |  |    |                             |
|----|--|----|-----------------------------|
| a. | <i>ni hóp·a-m ka-také·-welak</i>                       | b. | <i>hél·a ma-tujé·-welak</i> |
|    | this hole-ABL I-exit-wish                              |    | NEG we-rest-wish            |
|    | “I wish I could get out of this hole.”                 |    | “Let’s not take a rest!”    |
| c. | <i>ka-liláw-ne-ʔi-welak</i>                            | d. | <i>ka-menáw-welak</i>       |
|    | I-tell-BEN-AND-purpose                                 |    | I-try-want                  |
|    | “I’m going over there to tell [them].”                 |    | “I’m going to try.”         |
| e. | <i>ka-háju-n ʔeké· wé·ʔa-welak</i>                     |    |                             |
|    | my-dogs-SBJ somewhere go-hope                          |    |                             |
|    | “I hope my dogs disappear.” / “May my dogs disappear!” |    |                             |

This verbal suffix marks situations in which the speaker desires a given state of affairs to be true, as in (7a), as well as future situations, as in (7d), optative situations, as in (7e), and commands addressed to the speaker + the addressee (as in (7b)). Furthermore, the suffix is used in purpose constructions such as the one exemplified in (7c). All these situations share the unreal character of the state of affairs depicted by the clause, so that it would be justified to label *-welak* as an irrealis marker. The suffix, however, originates from a verb meaning ‘to want, like’ (Callaghan 1998: 229), and the diachronic path(s) leading to its present-day differentiated uses are very familiar paths, known from plenty of diachronic studies of modality, connecting different sub-areas within this domain (desire > future; desire > optative; future > imperative, etc.). As a result, a label irrealis would be devoid of any conceptual/semantic significance: we do not have to do with a general marker that can be abstractly characterized in terms of the irreality of its uses. Rather, we have a polysemous marker whose multiple meanings can be analyzed in terms of more specific meaning relations.

Generalizing Bybee’s argument, one could say that the different, and often idiosyncratic distributions of so-called (ir)realis markers in languages in which reality status is said to be a pervasive grammatical category are the result of different diachronic patterns leading to the present-day situation. These diachronic patterns involve local changes and extensions from one modal meaning to another, following paths connecting different sub-areas of the domain of modality (as described, e.g., by Bybee *et al.* 1994, or by van der Auwera & Plungian 1998). These paths generally connect grams originally used to encode agent-oriented modal meanings (i.e. meanings concerned with “the existence of internal and external conditions on an agent with respect to the completion of the action expressed in the main predicate”, Bybee *et al.* 1994: 177) to speaker-oriented (i.e. allowing the speaker “to impose such conditions on the addressee”, Bybee *et al.* 1994: 179) and epistemic meanings, and are based on mechanisms of generalization, metonymic, and metaphorical change that are well-known from the studies on grammaticalization and that arise in highly specific contexts. Furthermore, a gram may develop multiple uses following multiple paths within the domain of modality, so that in the end its distribution may resemble the distribution of so-called irrealis markers, but its uses are not necessarily contiguous on a single path, and may not be closely related semantically. In other words, lack of reality is not the relevant dimension explaining why there is shared coding of the sub-functions falling within this domain, and irrealis could be at last a descriptively useful label.

## 2. The reality of (ir)realis. Ways out of a dilemma

Advocates of the grammatical significance of (ir)realis (e.g. Givón 1994, 2001; Verstraete 2005) have countered many objections to Bybee's arguments. Givón (1994: 323), for instance, rejects Bybee's view that "only ... categories that are marked uniformly by a single language, or are grouped in the same way by most languages, have mental reality", and contends that the cross-linguistic mismatches in the delimitation of what constitutes an (ir)realis SoA (and is grammatically marked as irrealis) are indeed due to the different diachronic sources of (ir)realis markers, "the choice among alternative grammaticalization pathways [of irrealis] being not made in a grammatical vacuum" (Givón 1994: 328, adapted). In other words, the apparently messy distribution of irrealis markers across languages does not preclude the possibility of identifying irrealis as a cross-linguistically valid category: as is the case with other grams (such as, e.g., the passive), the cross-linguistic differences between irrealis grams/constructions are the result of the diversity of their diachronic sources, and once a given marker penetrates the complex irrealis domain starting from a given bridgehead, it may extend to other irrealis SoAs on the basis of the perceived resemblance among them (i.e., on the basis of **their shared unactualized nature**), the extension representing nothing "but a small local step" (Givón 1994: 320). Based on the modal system of non-Pama-Nyungan languages of Australia, Verstraete (2005) identifies "potential actualization" as the robust core meaning shared by all irrealis SoAs, and explains the irrealis marking of counterfactual and negated SoAs (in which there is no "potential actualization") as the result of processes of pragmatic implicature. Both Givón and Verstraete admit, more or less implicitly, that a feature of "non-actualization", spelled out in various ways (*epistemic uncertainty* according to Givón, *potential actualization* according to Verstraete) is likely to determine the speaker's synchronic use of so-called irrealis markers, and to motivate their diachronic extensions.

Moreover, as also underscored by Cristofaro (this volume), a systematic discussion of the various patterns that are labelled 'irrealis' in the literature, and a detailed understanding of **what factors are involved in the emergence and establishing of many of these patterns** are still missing, so that "it is not clear that the analysis advocated by Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca can be generalized to all of the cases that have been accounted for in terms of 'irrealis' in the literature".

Any well-founded diachronic investigation of (ir)realis, whether in a single language or across languages, should start from the following question: is it possible to identify cases in which the conceptual distinction between actualized and unactualized situations plays a role in the processes of extension of particular forms from one conceptual situation to some other *unactualized* situation (resulting in the multifunctionality patterns attested at the synchronic level)? If the answer to this question is positive, then it is necessary to admit (i) that a general notion of "(un)actualized SoA" is part of a speaker's knowledge of her/his language insofar as it determines the diachronic developments of particular constructions, and (ii) that there is the possibility that this notion is also conceptually sound and significant at the synchronic level. If, on the contrary, the answer is negative, and the well-known grammaticalization paths attested within the realm of modality can give answers to the distributional patterns of alleged irrealis markers, then, as de Haan (this volume) frankly puts it, "there is no reason to assume a category of reality status to preclude such answers".

Once one is confronted with the relatively few studies devoted to the diachronic emergence of generalized irrealis markers, the impression may arise that lack of reality is – at least in some cases – the feature motivating the extension of forms from the expression of one conceptual situation to another. In other cases, on the contrary, the relevant features behind the extension of forms from one situation to another seem to have nothing to do with the unactualized character of the SoA.

Consider, for instance, the following data from Pilagá and Toba:

(8) Pilagá (Guaicuruan; Vidal & Klein 1998: 181)

- a. *ñi-woren-a ga' harina*  
1SG-buy-AGR.SG CL.DISTAL flour  
“I will buy flour.” (the flour is not present, but the speaker implies that it will be)
- b. *qo-ya-saañi ga' lapat*  
PASS-3SG-throw CL.DISTAL meat  
“The meat is/should be added.”
- c. *qo'li w'o ha-ga' ar-wa*  
INTERR EXIST F-CL.DISTAL 2.POSS-spouse  
“Do you have a wife?”

(9) Toba (Guaicuruan; Vidal & Klein 1998: 181)

- a. *ramari ya-nim ha-ka-lere ka-Juan*  
PRO.3SG 3SG-give F-CL.DISTAL-book CL.DISTAL-Juan  
“He will give the book to John.”
- b. *nagi qohawot sa-hañi ka-waloq*  
when rain 1SG-sow CL.DISTAL-cotton  
“When it rains, I will start to sow cotton.”
- c. *nege' ka-m-wirwo'*  
INTERR CL.DISTAL-3SG-arrive  
“Who arrived?”

In Pilagá and Toba there are no TAM markers on the verb. Yet, the irrealis status of a proposition arises as the result of conventionalization of pragmatic inferences: both languages employ a distal classifier *ga'/ka* attached to nominals, whose meaning is “absent/out of sight but potentially present/coming into sight”. This classifier is inherently future-projecting: the referent is not there but will be there in the future. Categorizing the nominal referents through *ga'* and *ka* “yields the association in the mind of the speaker between the construal of the event as of future projection (thus, as yet unrealized) or hypothetical and the affected referent as not yet present ... the speaker manipulates these forms so that the hearer infers that the proposition has not been fulfilled” (Vidal & Klein 1998: 185). Although they are not fully grammaticalized as irrealis markers (they are non-obligatory except in negative existentials), the central meaning component of the two distal classifiers is the not-yet-present nature of their referents, i.e., their being, in a sense, unactualized, and their use across different unrealized situations is motivated precisely by this component. Minimally, this fact shows that the notion of “irrealis”, at least in some cases, is not merely a descriptive notion but a conceptual notion that is significant for speakers “insofar as it determines a speaker’s novel uses of particular constructions” (Cristofaro, this volume) and a theoretically sound notion providing an adequate characterization of certain diachronic processes.

In other cases, however, the unactualized character of the SoA does not seem to play any role in the diachronic development of irrealis markers. In a number of languages subjunctives, i.e. forms devoted to the expression of various less-than-real meanings, derive from old presents that have been ousted from the most typical contexts in which present forms occur (e.g. on-going SoAs) as a consequence of the development of a new (progressive) present (Haspelmath 1998). The polysemy of these grams, which express a range of meanings not different from the distribution of “irrealis” markers in, say, Austronesian or Trans-New-Guinea languages, has nothing to do with the perceived resemblance between the unreal situation types that they encode, but represents “an indirect result of a different grammaticalization path” (Haspelmath 1998: 34). In other words, as a result of the development of new progressive forms, the use of non-progressive forms in these languages has become restricted to contexts such as habituais, futures, purpose clauses, protases of

reality conditionals, temporal clauses introduced by conjunctions such as “until”, complements of verbs such as “be necessary”, etc, and it is only by chance that all these contexts involve unactualized situations.

### 3. Overview of the papers

The data discussed in the previous section, however controversial, show that the (linguistic, grammatical, conceptual) “reality” of (ir)realis is an issue that still deserves careful diachronic and typological investigations, and suggest that diachrony might hold the key to a full understanding of what languages code when they code reality status. Put optimistically, however, diachronic work on (ir)realis is still in its infancy. Moreover, in most of the cases in which a language is said to have a fully-fledged reality status system, there is hardly anything known about how that system came about, and where the sources of (ir)realis markers are to be looked for: the lucky cases in which the connection between an alleged (ir)realis marker and its source is still synchronically evident are presumably a minority, and there are possibly many more cases in which the marker is totally opaque.

A concern for the diachrony of (ir)realis markers and for how systems of reality status marking come into existence is shared by most of the papers collected in this special issue, which approach such a question from a variety of angles and include both detailed accounts of language-specific phenomena and cross-linguistic surveys of (ir)realis and irrealis sub-domains.

The special issue opens with **Ferdinand de Haan**’s introductory paper “Irrealis: fact or fiction?”, in which a complete account of how realis and irrealis have been used in the literature is provided, and different theoretical positions on what reality status boils down to are illustrated. After a re-examination of the full dossier of semantic categories that are known to be problematic with respect to their linguistic classification in terms of realis vs. irrealis (future tense, habitual aspect, negation, etc.), de Haan’s conclusion on whether (ir)realis can be considered a grammatical category is sceptical, if not negative. This negative conclusion, however, should be seen as “an opportunity to shift the focus onto more important matters” such as, for instance, the individuation of cross-linguistic regularities and of similarities among morphemes and constructions that encode (subsets of) unrealized SoAs, and the search for explanations of such regularities. After all, as de Haan wisely reminds us, we are just throwing away a label, and not a linguistic analysis.

A similar negative stance on the existence of a grammatical category called (ir)realis is shared by **Sonia Cristofaro** in her paper “Descriptive notions vs. grammatical categories: unrealized states of affairs and ‘irrealis’”. According to Cristofaro, there are three issues that have failed to be kept distinct in the debate on (ir)realis: (i) the descriptive usefulness of (ir)realis (i.e. whether the notion of unrealized state of affairs can be used to describe particular grammatical patterns); (ii) the diachronic relevance of this notion (i.e., whether a general notion of “unrealized SoA” plays some role in the mechanisms that bring about grammatical patterns described in terms of (ir)realis), and (iii) the status of (ir)realis as a grammatical category of particular languages. As to the first issue, the re-examination of some well-known patterns of distribution of irrealis markers leads Cristofaro to argue that it is necessary “to distinguish between the possibility to use particular notions, such as that of unrealized situation, to describe observed grammatical patterns, and the specific role of these notions in the shaping of these patterns”. Cristofaro exemplifies her point of view by (re)considering the sets of realis and irrealis person markers of many Austronesian languages, and the realis and irrealis switch reference markers attested in languages such as Amele and Jamul Tiipay. In many of these cases, in spite of the lack of conclusive historical evidence, there are some (formal and semantic) clues that show that the two sets of markers have a different historical origin: realis/irrealis person markers may have originated from the conflation of reality-insensitive person markers with some other material, as some languages seem to suggest (e.g., Sinaugoro), and there is no need to postulate that in these languages there is a distinction between actualized and unactualized SoAs that is reflected in the coding of person. Similarly, Amele irrealis switch

reference markers can be said to ultimately derive from a future form, and it is the particular semantics of the medial clause, which encodes SoAs that are simultaneous with that of the final clause, that explains why a form infused with a meaning of futurity may have come to be used in dependence of a number of final clauses all encoding unactualized SoAs, so that there is no need to postulate a grammatical category of irrealis that is manifested in the switch reference system of this language. As to the diachronic relevance of the notion of irrealis, Cristofaro shows that there are two major multifunctionality patterns of irrealis markers across languages: in some languages irrealis markers encode clusters of SoAs that are not presented as positively realized at some reference point, but may possibly take place at a later time (futures, optatives, etc.); in other languages irrealis markers tend to encode counterfactual situations, negated (past) events, and other kinds of unfulfilled SoAs. The very existence of these two patterns is suggestive of the fact that it is not a general notion of unactualized SoA that is responsible for the emergence and establishing of these patterns (otherwise one would expect that just any type of unrealized states of affairs could be included in a single multifunctionality pattern), and that these patterns are better accounted for as resulting from processes of contextual inference. The failure of a general notion of “unactualized SoA” to account for such multifunctionality patterns, however, should not blind us as to the fact that there may be other patterns in which this notion might play some role in the development of irrealis markers. Cristofaro discusses some cases in which such a notion seems to be involved in processes of extension of a given form to new meanings, but concludes that in none of these cases there is conclusive evidence that irrealis is a grammatical category endowed with mental reality.

As noted, among many others, by Chafe (1995) and Mithun (1995), imperatives and prohibitives are among the most problematic cases of swing categories with respect to (ir)realis marking. The two papers by Mauri & Sansò and by van der Auwera & Devos deal with positive imperatives and prohibitives, respectively, and explore their connection with (ir)realis marking. The hybrid behaviour of directives with respect to reality status marking is generally explained on the basis of the functional and semantic properties of directive situations, which have “a status intermediate between the extremes of realis and irrealis”, because they “express ideas that are judged to be relatively more in accord with reality than, say, yes-no questions or negations” (Chafe 1995: 358), and because speakers might intentionally mark commands as realis in order to convey a “strong certainty of their immediate realization” (Mithun 1995: 377). The somewhat *ad-hoc* character of this kind of explanation is the point of departure of **Caterina Mauri & Andrea Sansò**’s paper on “The reality status of directives and their coding across languages”. Based on a large typological sample, Mauri & Sansò argue that the dimension of reality status is not directly relevant to the cross-linguistic coding of directive situations: the presence of (ir)realis markers (or their absence) in directive constructions is to be explained simply as one of the possible morphosyntactic properties of the source constructions from which they derive (futures, optatives, etc.), which tends to be maintained also in the target, not as the manifestation of an inherent realis, irrealis or hybrid nature of directive situations. Furthermore, by decomposing directive situations into their basic semantic components, Mauri & Sansò show that the extension of a given source construction to the coding of directive situations is not motivated by the logical irrealis shared by the source and the target function, but is based on more local semantic similarities between the source and the target construction that are independent of the notion of (un)actualized SoA as such.

Prohibitives, are, in a sense, doubly irrealis from a logical standpoint because they imply both an order and a negation. Moreover, given that languages sometimes encode negatives as irrealis and sometimes also positive imperatives, prohibitives might be said, on a purely abstract basis, to have double chance to be encoded as irrealis in a given language. In their paper on “Irrealis in positive imperatives and in prohibitives”, **Johan van der Auwera & Maud Devos** try to answer the seemingly simple question whether there is any sense in which prohibitives can be said to be more typically irrealis than positive imperatives. This question, when one tries to answer it, actually turns out to be quite complex, depending on how one operationalizes it: van der Auwera & Devos’ typological survey of prohibitives in relation to (ir)realis marking translates this question into a

number of more specific questions, and shows that with respect to irrealis marking, there is no general implicational relationship between imperative and prohibitive (i.e. it does not follow from the fact that a language has an irrealis positive imperative that it has an irrealis prohibitive), a fact that is suggestive of different and (at least partially) independent diachronies for imperatives and prohibitives.

**Paola Pietrandrea** (“The conceptual structure of irrealis. A focus on non-exclusion-of-factuality as a conceptual and a linguistic category”) argues that irrealis is a complex notion, to be kept separate from modality (unlike many advocates of their significance do) and to be sectioned into at least three conceptual domains (counterfactuality, non-exclusion of factuality, and non-referentiality). Her paper focuses on non-exclusion-of-factuality (or NEF) as a conceptual category, to be regarded as a defining component of different situation types (counterfactuals, alternative relations, optatives, weak imperatives/suggestions, etc.) that are typically coded as irrealis across languages. Pietrandrea then analyzes a family of Italian constructions in which the focus particle *magari*, roughly paraphraseable as ‘maybe’, is used, and discusses whether this (family of) constructions, which explicitly encode NEF, can be considered as a grammatical marker or not. While the grammatical status of this family of constructions depends on what view of grammar (and constructions) one adheres to, it is a fact that *magari*-constructions in Italian are dedicated to the expression of NEF: if one adheres to the view that in order to be considered a proper conceptual category, a semantic notion should be expressed by a dedicated form in at least one language, then the existence of NEF as a conceptual category is granted by the existence of this family of constructions in Italian.

The special issue closes with three papers presenting new in-depth data from three unrelated languages, Swahili, Teiwa (Papuan), and Singaporean Colloquial English. **Ellen Contini-Morava** (“The message in the navel: (ir)realis and negation in Swahili”) discusses three verbal suffixes in Swahili that have been traditionally described in terms of (ir)realis (e.g. as *wirklich / erwünscht, möglich / nicht wirklich* by Meinhof 1906), and shows that their characterization in terms of reality status is inadequate: the (ir)realis overtones of these suffixes are the outcome of the complex interaction among tense, aspect, modality and negation markers, and are not part of their meaning. Focusing on the co-occurrence restrictions of these suffixes with negation markers, Contini-Morava further shows that the difference in meaning between two Swahili negative affixes, which differ in terms of their possibility to co-occur with two of the aforementioned suffixes, does not coincide with the realis/irrealis boundary but has to do with another dimension, that of forcefulness of assertion. **Marian Klammer** (“Reality status in Teiwa (Papuan)”) discusses the typologically unusual case of a language in which there is an overt realis morpheme while irrealis is left unmarked. The discourse function of the realis suffix (marking foregrounded events in texts) is also investigated and the connections between reality status (intended as an objective property of SoAs) and the discourse prominence of SoAs (intended as a subjective dimension mirroring the speaker’s point of view) are explored. Finally, **Debra Ziegeler** (“On the interaction of past tense and potentiality in Singaporean Colloquial English”) discusses the curious case of a contact variety in which habituality in the present is expressed by means of past forms (i.e. forms usually associated with actualized SoAs), whereas past habituality, which is by and large more frequently encoded by means of irrealis markers (Cristofaro 2004), happens to be encoded by means of non-past forms of the verb. Ziegeler shows how this mismatch in reality status has emerged in Singaporean Colloquial English: the past tense in this contact variety appears to grammaticalize “precedence”, a notion which has to do with perfectivity but also implies the “potential recurrence or continuation in the future” of a given SoA, thus being an optimal candidate for expressing habituality.

## Abbreviations

1, 2, 3 = 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> person; ABL = ablative; AGR = agreement marker; AND = andative; BEN = beneficiary; CL = classifier; CTFC = counterfactual; DAT = dative; EMPH = emphatic; EXIST = existential; F = feminine; FUT = future; IDEOPH =

ideophone; IMP = imperative; INTERR = interrogative; IPFV = imperfective; IRR = irrealis; LOC = locative; M = masculine; MIX = mixed subject; NEG = negation; OBJ = object; PASS = passive; PL = plural; POSS = possessive; POT = potential; PRO = pronoun; PST = past; REAL = realis; SBJ = subject; SFP = sentence final particle; SG = singular.

## References

- Bybee, J., 1998. "Irrealis" as a grammatical category. *Anthropological Linguistics* 40 (2), 257-271.
- Bybee, J. L., Fleischman, S. (Eds.), 1995. *Modality in Grammar and Discourse*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Bybee, J., Perkins, R., Pagliuca, W. 1994. *The evolution of grammar. Tense, aspect, and modality in the languages of the world*. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Callaghan, C. A., 1998. Lake Miwok Irrealis. *Anthropological Linguistics* 40 (2), 228-233.
- Chafe, W., 2005. The Realis - Irrealis distinction in Caddo, the Northern Iroquoian languages, and English. In: Bybee and Fleischman (Eds.), pp. 349-365.
- Chung, S., Timberlake, A., 1985. Tense, aspect, and mood. In: Shopen, T. (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description, Vol. III: Grammatical categories and the lexicon*, pp. 202-258. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Conrad, R. J., with Wogiga, K., 1991. *An outline of Bukiyip grammar*. Pacific Linguistics, Canberra.
- Cristofaro, S., 2004. Past habituais and irrealis. In: Lander, Y. A., Plungian, V. A., Urmanchieva, A. Yu. (Eds.), *Irrealis and Irreality*. Gnosis, Moscow, pp. 256-272.
- Donohue, M. 1999. *A grammar of Tukang Besi*. Mouton de Gruyter, Berlin.
- Elliott, J. R., 2000. Realis and irrealis: Forms and concepts of the grammaticalisation of reality. *Linguistic Typology* 4, 55-90.
- Foley, W. A., Van Valin, R. D., 1984. *Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Givón, T., 1984. *Syntax. A functional-typological introduction. Vol. 1*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Givón, T., 1994. Irrealis and the subjunctive. *Studies in Language* 18 (2), 265-337.
- Givón, T., 2001. *Syntax. An Introduction. Vol. 1. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.
- Haspelmath, M., 1998. The semantic development of old presents: New futures and subjunctives without grammaticalization. *Diachronica* 15 (1), 29-62.
- Hellenthal, A.-Ch., 2007. Modality properties of sentence type markers in Sheko. In: Hendriks, P., Rau, F., Součková, R., van der Wal, J. (Eds.), *Leiden Papers in Linguistics* 4 (2), pp. 17-32.
- Macaulay, M., 1996. *A Grammar of Chalcatongo Mixtec*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Meinhof, C., 1906. *Grundzüge einer vergleichenden Grammatik der Bantusprachen*. D. Reimer, Berlin.
- Mithun, M., 1995. On the relativity of irreality. In: Bybee and Fleischman (Eds.), pp. 367-388.
- Palmer, F. R., 2001. *Mood and modality. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Timberlake, A., 2007. Aspect, tense, mood. In: Shopen, T. (Ed.), *Language typology and syntactic description, Volume III*, pp. 280-333. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- van der Auwera, J., Plungian, V., 1998. Modality's semantic map. *Linguistic Typology* 2, 79-124.
- Van Valin, R. D., La Polla, R. J., 1997. *Syntax. Structure, Meaning and Function*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Verstraete, J.-Ch., 2005. The semantics and pragmatics of composite mood marking: The non-Pama-Nyungan languages of northern Australia. *Linguistic Typology* 9 (2), 223-268.
- Vidal, A., Manelis Klein, H. E., 1998. Irrealis in Pilagá and Toba? Syntactic versus pragmatic coding. *Anthropological Linguistics* 40 (2), 175-197.