

Irrealis as Polarity Sensitivity

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1 Polarity sensitivity

Negative polarity items: items that cannot be used in a simple affirmative sentence. They appear with negation and in other environments, such as questions, antecedents of conditionals, adversative predicates etc. (Ladusaw 1980, Israel 1996, Giannakidou 1998)¹.

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| (1) *I saw anybody. | AFFIRMATIVE |
| (2) I didn't see anybody. | NEGATION |
| (3) Have you seen anyone? | QUESTION |
| (4) If you see anybody, tell me. | CONDITIONAL |
| (5) It's too dark to see anything. | COMPARATIVE |
| (6) I rarely/*often see any of them. | INFREQUENTATIVE ADVERB |

Noun phrases: indefinites (*anybody*), minimizers (*a word*).

Idioms with minimizers *lift a finger*. Time adverbials: *until*.

NPI licensing in English: downward monotonicity. (Ladusaw 1980; von Stechow 1999).

More licensing environments in other languages.

Greek (Giannakidou 1998:15, 59)

- | | |
|--|-----------------------|
| (7) *Idha <i>kanenan</i> fititi.
Saw some/any student.
'I saw some student'. | AFFIRMATIVE |
| (8) Tha vro <i>kanena</i> filo na me voithisi.
FUT find.1SG some/any friend SUBJ me help.3SG.
'I will find a friend to help me'. | FUTURE |
| Russian: | |
| (9) *Ja včera s <i>kem-nibud'</i> razgovarival.
I yesterday with someone.NONSPEC.INSTR talked.
'I talked to someone yesterday' | AFFIRMATIVE |
| (10) Prinesi mne čto-nibud'.
Bring-IMP me-DAT something.NONSPEC.
'Bring me something'. | IMPERATIVE |
| (11) Vy dolžny/možete mne kak-nibud' pomoč'.
You must/can me somehow.NONSPEC help-INF.
'You must/can help me somehow'. | POSSIBILITY/NECESSITY |

¹ Positive polarity items, such as *would rather* and *already*, will not be discussed in this talk.

2 Irrealis

Many languages have a modality category of *reality status* (Elliott 2000), usually marked on the verb, with *realis* and *irrealis* as possible values.

Simple past and present are always realis (Palmer 2001:168).

Manam (Lichtenberk 1983:183):

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| (12) u-nó?u
1SG.REAL-jump
'I jumped' | PAST, AFFIRMATIVE |
| (13) úra i-pura=púra
rain 3sg.real-come-REDUPL
'It's raining'. | PRESENT, AFFIRMATIVE |
| Environments that can be marked irrealis:
Caddo (Chafe 1995; Melnar 2004): | |
| (14) sah?-yi=bahw-nah
2ND.AGENT.IRREALIS-see-PERFECT
'Have you seen him?' | YES-NO QUESTION |
| (15) kúy-t'a-yi=bahw
NEG-1ST.AGENT.IRREALIS-see
'I don't see him' | NEGATION |
| (16) kaš-sah?-yi=bahw
PROHIBITIVE-2ND.AGENT.IRREALIS-see
'Don't look at it!' | PROHIBITION (NEGATIVE IMPERATIVE) |
| (17) kas-sa-náy=?aw
OBLIGATIVE-3RD.AGENT.IRREALIS-sing
'He should/is supposed to sing'. | OBLIGATION |
| (18) hí-t'a-yi=bahw
CONDITIONAL-1ST.AGENT.IRREALIS-see
'If I see it' | ANTECEDENT OF A CONDITIONAL |
| Muyuw (Bugenhagen 1993:18). | |
| (19) Yey b-a-n Lae nubweig
I IRR-1SG-go Lae tomorrow.
'I will go to Lae tomorrow'. | FUTURE |
| Manam (Lichtenberk 1983:188): | |
| (20) go- moaná?o
2SG.IRR-eat
'Eat!' | IMPERATIVE |
| (21) ta- soá?i-to
1PL.INCL.IRR-sit- PAUCAL
'Let's sit down'. | HORTATIVE |

To explain this contrast, a modified veridicality condition is proposed for sentences with a two place quantifier Q(A, B). According to this condition, such a sentence is veridical iff $Q(A,B) \Rightarrow (A \Rightarrow B)$, that is, the sentence entails that B is true in all the contexts satisfying A. This way *usually* is nonveridical and *always* is veridical (see the truth conditions below).

$$(31) [[\text{USUALLY } A \text{ B}]] = 1 \text{ iff } |[A] \cap [B]| < |[A] - [B]|$$

$$(32) [[\text{ALWAYS } A \text{ B}]] = 1 \text{ iff } [A] \subseteq [B]$$

However, this contrast is not manifested in Russian:

- (33) Pered tem, kak leč' spat', ja vseгда čital kakoj-nibud' žurnal.
 Before that, COMP lie sleep, I always read-PAST some.NONSPEC magazine.
 'Before going to bed, I always read some magazine'.

This sentence is veridical even according to the modified definition, so nonveridicality is not a necessary condition for NPI licensing.

4.2 Licensing by non-specificity (non-referentiality)

In some sentences a noun phrase can have two interpretations: referential and non-referential. The two interpretations can be demonstrated with the following example (Croft 1983):

- (34) Freida wants to buy a Persian rug.

Under the referential interpretation (wide existential scope), the noun phrase *a Persian rug* refers to a particular rug Freida wants to buy. Under the non-referential interpretation (narrow existential scope), Freida does not have a specific rug in mind, and the NP *a Persian rug* does not refer to any particular object.

Allowing the non-referential (non-specific) interpretation of noun phrases is a property that the habitual shares with nonveridical environments (Givón 1994:270, 322; Croft 1983). In an affirmative sentence (35) the NP must be referential. In (36), with the habitual meaning, the non-referential interpretation of the NP is available, and in fact, preferred.

- (35) He bought a new car.
 (36) He buys a new car every year.

This observation allows us to propose a **modified licensing condition** for both irrealis and other NPIs:

- (37) Irrealis marking/NPIs can be used only in such environments that *allow the non-referential interpretation* of noun phrases.

Indeed, Croft (1983) observed that these are the environments in Russian in which the *-nibud'* items can be used. The grammaticality (33) is explained by this condition.

5 Assertion/Presupposition

- Irrealis

Irrealis is sometimes used in the complements of factive verbs, although the truth of these complements is presupposed. This is not expected according to the usual definitions of the realis/irrealis distinction.

Subjunctive in Spanish (Givón 1994:304-310; Butt and Benjamin 1988:224-225; Lunn 1995; Bybee 1998:268):

- (38) Me alegra que sepa la verdad.
 me pleases that know.2SG.SUBJ the truth
 'I'm glad you know the truth'.

- (39) Me molesta que te quejes tanto.
 Me bothers that REFL complain.2SG.SUBJ so.
 'It bothers me that you complain so much'.

The admirative prefix *hús-* in Caddo, expressing surprise, is used with irrealis.

- (40) hús-ba-?a=sa-yi=k'awih-sa?
 ADMIRATIVE-1ST.BENEFICIARY.IRREALIS-name-know-PROGRESSIVE
 'Surprisingly, he knows my name'

- NPIs

Negative polarity items can be used in the complements of factives (Linebarger 1980; Kadmon and Landman 1993; von Stechow 1999):

- (41) Bill is glad/surprised that we got any tickets at all.
 (42) *Bill knows that we got any tickets at all.

For example, *at all* is licensed not only with emotive factive, but also in other environments containing background information.

- (43) Once more bugs are worked out, they will look into recovering the missing posts, but for now, at least we have the board at all.

The Russian particle *xot'* 'at least' cannot be used with assertion of new information. It can be used with background information and in non-asserting environments.

The affirmative sentence (44) can be used only when it's already established that we have some tickets. The particle *xot'* can be used freely in complements of factive predicates (46), questions (47), antecedents of conditionals (48) and with obligations (50)

- (44) My xot' kakie-to bilety kupili.
 We at-least some tickets bought.
 'At least we have tickets of some kind'.

- (45) My kupili kakie-to bilety.
 We bought some tickets.
 'We bought some tickets'.

- (46) Xorošo, čto my xot' kakie-to bilety kupili. FACTIVE
 Good that we at-least some tickets bought.
 'It's good that we bought any tickets at all'.

- (47) Vy xot' kakie-to bilety kupili? QUESTION
 You at-least some tickets bought?
 'Have you bought any tickets at all?'

(48) Esli vy kupite xot' kakie-to bilety, pozvonite nam. CONDITIONAL

If you buy at-least some tickets, call us.

'If you buy any tickets, call us'.

Compare past affirmative (49) and future obligation (50).

(49) Kakie bilety vy kupili? - *Xot' kakie-to

Which tickets you bought? – At-least some.

'What tickets have you bought?'

(50) Kakie bilety nado kupit'? - Xot' kakie-nibud'.

What tickets is-needed buy? - At-least some.

'What tickets do (we) have to buy?'

The following sentence is infelicitous without *nakonec-to* 'finally'.

(51) *(Nakonec-to) my polučili xot' kakie-to podrobnosti o Gothic 3.³

Finally we received at-least some details about Gothic 3.

'Finally we got some details about Gothic 3'.

- Explanations

Givón (1994:306-307) on subjunctive:

If an event is *epistemically* less expected, chances are that one's emotional *valuative* reaction to it – surprise, preference, aversion – is stronger.

Giannakidou (2006: 46) on NPIs:

(52) I am glad we got any tickets at all!

Content expectation: I expected that we would not be able to get tickets.

6 Conclusions

Irrealis and other NPIs: similar licensing environments and similar problems in describing these environments.

Environments:

- nonveridical / not denoting actualised eventualities
- habitual
- presupposed/non-asserted

This supports the view that the irrealis category is a negative polarity item.

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³ From forum.igromania.ru/archive/index.php/t-5857.html

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