Biloxi Realis and Irrealis Particles

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1. Introduction

Realis and irrealis expressions are modal or pragmatic in nature. Realis and irrealis particles reflect “the grammaticization of speakers’ (subjective) attitudes and opinions” (Bybee et al. 1994: 176). They reflect a speaker’s attitude or level of certainty about the likelihood of a particular, usually past or future, action or occurrence. Among Indo-European languages, heavy focus is placed on grammar and syntax. However, in Siouan and other Native American languages, greater speaker-centered modal usage requires more focus on pragmatics and discourse.

In this paper, I compare the use of two Biloxi (ISO 639-3 bll) particles and explore what their use tells us about Biloxi discourse and pragmatics. I examine various uses of these particles as they appear in Biloxi narratives. Biloxi is a dormant Siouan language, a member of the Ohio Valley branch of the Siouan language family.

2. Realis and irrealis

The term “irrealis” is a modal distinction that refers to speech acts that are counterfactual, such as in conditional, hortative, and imperative utterances, or in utterances expressing obligation or future occurrences. That is, irrealis generally includes events still within the realm of thought or imagination, while realis normally includes events “actualized, actually occurring or having occurred” (Mithun 1995: 375). In some languages, irrealis can include past events as well as interrogatives and negatives.

The realis-irrealis modal distinction is grammatically indicated in different ways, including by the use of particles, clausal clitics, and verbal inflection. Due to such broad variation, “the utility of the labels ‘Irrealis’ and ‘Realis’ for cross-linguistic comparison is open to question” (Mithun 1995: 368). In fact, the conceptual distinction between the use of realis and irrealis marking is often a matter of pragmatics and discourse, and speakers of languages incorporating the realis versus irrealis distinction may do so “for expressive purposes” (ibid.: 385) or to display their own attitude or expectations about the possibility or probability of a particular occurrence.

The realis-irrealis distinction is reported in many languages worldwide, including in a number of Native American languages. The classification of certain speech acts to be in the realm of “irrealis” is crosslinguistically highly variable (Mithun 1995), and what is considered to be realis in one language may be considered irrealis in another (Bybee 1998: 267).

The typical scope of irrealis marking is over a clause. The two Biloxi particles are dađe and hi.

3. The future particle dađe

Dorsey and Swanton (1912) translate dađe as a future particle meaning “will” or “shall.” Einaudi analyzes it as a type of “potential mode” marker (1974: 81), as she does hi. They are
both correct to some degree, but neither of them explores the difference in usage between the two particles.

The particle *dąde* is likely a contraction of *dē* ‘go’ (with ablaut to *da*, which happens before positional auxiliaries) + *ąde* ‘move,’ a verb + positional auxiliary construction indicating continuative or progressive aspect, which then became grammaticized to a future marker.

Examples (1)-(3) show the use of *dąde* to denote a possible future event:

1. \[ Witedi ko tha dąde. \]
   tomorrow ? die FUT
   ‘He will die tomorrow.’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 124, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

2. \[ Ák-a dąde na \]
   1-say FUT DECL.m
   ‘I will say it.’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 47, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

3. \[ N-yi-nopa ą-da dąde. \]
   1.2.two 1-go FUT
   ‘I will go with you.’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 137)

Example (4) demonstrates the use of *dąde* in a question:

4. \[ A-da dąde i-yuhi? \]
   1-go FUT 2-think
   ‘Did you think that I was going?’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 144)

Example (5) shows the use of *dąde* to mean ‘at the point of’ or ‘about to’:

5. \[ Tohana ąk-hu dąde. \]
   yesterday 1-come FUT
   ‘I was about to come yesterday.’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 180)

Examples (6)-(7) below show *dąde* used in reply to a question, presumably: “What is that (animal)?” Although it appears that a future particle is being used in response, I suspect that, in fact, *dąde* here is used with its original ungrammaticized progressive meaning of ‘go (along) moving,’ since animals are often referred to in the Biloxi texts as being in motion.

6. \[ Ktu dąde. \]
   *ktu da-ąde*
   cat go-MOVE
   ‘That is a cat.’
   (Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 160)
(7) *Coki dąde.*

`cōki da-a-de`

dog  go-MOVE

‘That is a dog.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 160)

Thus, except when retaining its ungrammaticized progressive meaning, *dąde* appears to be a grammaticized potential mode marker expressing a speaker’s stance of maximum certainty about a future event.

We can now turn to the particle *hi*. Unlike *dąde*, this particle expresses a speaker’s stance of minimum certainty about a potential occurrence.

3. The irrealis particle *hi*

Dorsey and Swanton (1912) were rather vague about the true nature and use of *hi*. Einaudi describes *hi* as a “hortatory” marker (1974: 80) and “potential mode” marker (ibid.: 92), as she does *dąde*. I agree with her analysis of *hi* as a marker of potential mode, although she did not clearly distinguish between the uses of the two markers *dąde* and *hi*.

Examples (8)-(9) show the use of *hi* to express a future idea:

(8)  

`i-duti hi na`

2-eat  IRR  DECL.m

‘You shall eat it.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 68, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

(9)  

`i-dox-tu hi ni`

2-see-PL  IRR  DECL.f

‘They shall see you.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 88, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

We can compare examples (8)-(9) with examples (1)-(3) in which the speaker conveys an attitude of more certainty, or, in the case of (2) and (3), greater intentionality, about the future occurrence with the use of *dąde* than is implied in (8) and (9) with *hi*.

Examples (10)-(11) demonstrate the use of *hi* with questions:

(10)  

*Cidike a-yaφ hi i-nąki wo?*

why  2-sing  IRR  2-sit  INTER.m

‘Why do you sit there singing?’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 146, cited in Einaudi 1974: 80)

(11)  

*Kawa ąk-/modal ta hi wo?*

something 1-do  want  IRR  INTER.m

‘What will (we) wish to do?’
We can compare examples (10)-(11) with example (4) in which the questioner appears to convey an attitude of more certainty about the listener’s past thought process through the use of *dąde*. Examples (12)-(13) reveal the use of *hi* in statements involving thinking:

(12)  
\[ Kɔni \ naxê \ naki \ hi \ yuhi. \]

mother listen sit |\textbf{1} | |\textbf{IRR} | think

‘He thought his mother was sitting (and) listening.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 28)

(13)  
\[ Ani \ a-\varphi(hi)-ni \ a\k-\varphi\da \ hi \ yihi. \]

water |\textbf{1} | |\textbf{see-NEG} | |\textbf{1-PROG} | |\textbf{IRR} | think

‘He thought I should not see the water.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 33, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

Compare (14) below without *hi* or any other particle; the absence of a particle indicates that the speaker strongly believes that the action has been completed:

(14)  
\[ A-duwê \ yuhi. \]

1-untie think

‘He thought that I untied it.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 145)

*Hi*, on the other hand, appears to mark an action that the speaker believes has not yet become or never became reality:

(15)  
\[ Duwa \ hi \ ax.\k\k-\varphi-di. \]

untie |\textbf{1} | |\textbf{IRR} | |\textbf{1-DAT}-say-\textbf{ASSERT}

‘I told him to untie it.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 145)

Similarly, in examples (16)-(17), *hi* marks the speaker’s uncertainty about whether the action would be or had been accomplished:

(16)  
\[ u.\varphi(\k\k) \ hi \ ki-\varphi-di \]

LOC.lie |\textbf{IRR} | |\textbf{DAT}-say-\textbf{ASSERT}

‘They told him to lie in it.’

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 113, cited in Einaudi 1974: 81)

(17)  
\[ u.\varphi(\k\k) \ dophi \ hi \ p\varphi\k-\k \ kiya \ ki-\varphi \]

LOC.lie see |\textbf{IRR} | |\textbf{sack-LOC} | |\textbf{again} | |\textbf{DAT}-say

‘He told him to lie in it to see how it is (again).’

\[1\] The two versions of Biloxi “think,” *yihi* and *yuhi*, exemplify that the Biloxi vowels *i* and *u* often appear interchangeable. Whether this is indicative of dialect difference or something else remains unknown.
Both *hi* and *dađe* can express future possibility, but there appears to be a pragmatic
distinction between them: a distinction reflecting a speaker’s emotional state or attitude at the
time of speaking. Similarly, in the unrelated Central Pomo (Hokan) language, two particles can
be used to express a future idea, *da* and *hla*:

(18)  
\[ \text{Ma-báya čá- l yó-w=da} \quad 'e \quad \text{mu- l ma'á chu-w= 'kʰe.} \]
\[ \text{POSS-man house=to go-PFV=DIFF.SIM.REALIS COP that food eat-PFV=FUT} \]
\[ \text{‘When her husband gets home, she’ll eat.’} \]

(Mithun 1995: 379)

According to the Central Pomo consultant, the use of realis *da* indicates that the action will
definitely be completed, whereas the irrealis counterpart *hla* would indicate some uncertainty. I
propose that this difference between Pomo *da* and *hla* is equivalent to the difference between
Biloxi *dađe* and *hi*.

I agree with Payne in considering realis-irrealis to fall along a continuum (1997: 244). Viewing
realis-irrealis as a gradual continuum rather than a duality, it appears that *dađe* is the
“more realis” particle and indicates more certainty on the part of the speaker, while *hi* is the
“more irrealis” form that demonstrates a higher level of doubt or uncertainty about the
occurrence.

The distinction between *dađe* and *hi* may also sometimes be related to Biloxi male versus
female speech patterns, respectively:

(19)  
\[ \text{Yac qφ-tu qda dađe.} \]
\[ \text{name make-PL move FUT} \]
\[ \text{‘They call him so, and he will be so.’ (male speaking)} \]

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 155)

(20)  
\[ \text{Yac qφ-tu qda hi ni.} \]
\[ \text{name make-PL move FUT DECL.f} \]
\[ \text{‘They call him so, and he will be so.’ (female speaking)} \]

(Dorsey and Swanton 1912: 155)

Since the man uses *dađe* while the woman uses *hi* for essentially the same utterance, this
may show “native speaker metapragmatic judgments” (Trechter 1995: 5) possibly related to
gendered speech patterns, or it may be related to the level of authority the speaker, regardless of
gender, wishes to convey.

Overall, *hi* appears to be used where more uncertainty is involved, such as in questions
and expressions of thinking or wishing. It is unclear, however, whether the term “irrealis”
should be used to refer to all of the situations in which *hi* is used. The use of “broad terms such as ‘irrealis’ unfortunately distracts the analyst from a more in-depth semantic analysis” (Bybee 1998: 266). The conceptual distinction between realis and irrealis marking is quite subjective
and is often a matter of pragmatics and discourse that varies across languages, defying clear and
rigid boundaries (Payne 1997).
4. Summary and conclusion

The two Biloxi irrealis particles *dąde* and *hi* are both used as future markers, one more realis (*dąde*) and one less realis (*hi*). More realis *dąde* implies more certainty while less realis *hi* implies less certainty. The choice is speaker-centered, or pragmatic, based on the speaker’s attitude and emotional state at the time of speaking. The choice may also reflect the gender of a speaker and his or her conformity to a cultural gender speech pattern, although more evidence is required to ascertain this. The particle *dąde* appears to be a grammaticized form of a an original progressive construction, which could still occur in a present tense existential manner, as shown in examples (6)-(7).

Realis and irrealis markers are similar to markers of evidentiality, which reflect the personal evaluation of the speaker about the perceived truth of a particular piece of information. Evidentiality is another aspect of Siouan languages that needs more study. Evidentiality marking clearly appears, however, through the use of different particles in Biloxi.

In languages like Biloxi that are more heavily modal-centered, a speaker must choose a particle that pragmatically best suits his or her feelings about the probability of a future event. In languages like English, this distinction is not syntactically required, although it can be expressed periphrastically using modal or separate verbs. But the fact that languages like Biloxi require the speaker to choose a particle falling along different parts of the realis-irrealis continuum reflects a greater degree of speaker-centered control over how much of their own feelings or attitude about a situation or occurrence they would like to convey to their listener.

Abbreviations

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References


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