

Modality and temporality in Atayal counterfactuals and implications

Sihwei Chen

sihweichen@gate.sinica.edu.tw

Academia Sinica

This talk addresses the modality and temporality of conditionals in Atayal (based on Squliq dialects), specially dealing with the meaning of the marker *aki*. I show that Atayal distinguishes so-called indicative and subjunctive/counterfactual conditionals by the absence and presence of *aki*, without involving past morphology. A consequence of this fact is that the prevalent approaches to the non-canonical use of past tense in counterfactuals (e.g., Iatridou 2000; Ippolito 2003; Arregui 2005; Romero 2014; a.o.) are not applicable to Atayal. Further support for the lack of fake past comes from the contribution of temporal marking in *aki* conditionals, which mirrors the temporal interpretation of a plain sentence.

Drawing on evidence from the use of *aki* in conditionals, I argue that *aki* refers to possible worlds that are alternative to the development of the actual world at *any* time. In the spirit of von Prince's (2019) three-dimensional modality, *aki* is analyzable as a modal that quantifies exclusively over counterfactual indices. Morphosyntactic evidence supports that *aki* is a modal element rather than a verb and that in parallel with circumstantial modals in the language, *aki* is inherently future-oriented, with a non-future orientation of the embedded eventuality being shifted by tense and aspect markers. In terms of functional distribution, *aki* is a lexical complex used not only in conditionals but also wishes and necessity modal constructions, and this differs from many Indo-European languages, where counterfactual marking is decomposable in these environments (von Fintel and Iatridou 2020).

While the semantics of *aki* closely resembles that of English *would*, extensive empirical data beyond conditionals show that *aki* differs from *would* in allowing variable strength of quantification. I argue that the lexical variability of strength of *aki* favors a choice function analysis for the weakening of universal quantification (Rullmann et al. 2008), rather than a compositional one (Rubinstein 2012, 2017; von Fintel and Iatridou 2008).

Furthermore, I explore the idea that modals, instead of tense or aspect, is the obligatory component of counterfactuality (cf. Van linden and Verstraete 2008; Muller & Ferreira 2019). Under Kratzer's (1986, 2012) analysis that *if*-clauses are restrictors of modals' domain, I suggest that special marking on *if*, the antecedent or both elements found in conditionals of a group of Formosan languages is simply agreement of counterfactual modality.

The finding of this work has several important theoretical and typological implications. The case of Atayal suggests two ways of composing counterfactuality across languages, one exclusively from modality and the other from extended modality of temporal marking. A further implication of this is that temporal orientation of conditionals can be independent of counterfactuality. The interaction of *aki* and future marking in Atayal also offers new insight into the issue on mood in Formosan languages and a new typology of dividing the factual, the counterfactual and the possible domain (cf. von Prince et al. 2019).