Overt Movement as a Marker of (Ir)realis in Iquito

Iquito is a highly endangered Zaparoan language spoken in the Loreto region of northern Peru. The language is typologically notable for the fact that it marks Reality Status (RS) purely syntactically (Beier et al. 2011) rather than morphologically, the latter being the norm for (ir)realis markers (Palmer 2001). Descriptively, the difference in word order shows SVO for realis (1a) and SXV(O) for irrealis (1b), with one syntactic object appearing between the subject and verb.[1]

(1a) Ima capi-qui-Ø   asúraaja   (realis)
       Ema cook-PFV-ECTNS manioc
       "Ema cooked manioc"   (Beier et al. 2011: 66, ex. 1b)

(1b) Ima asúraaja capi-qui-Ø   (irrealis)
       Ema manioc cook-PFV-ECTNS
       "Ema will cook manioc"   (Beier et al. 2011: 66 ex. 1a)

I descriptively refer to the structural position between the subject and the verb in irrealis clauses as "the irrealis position". Syntactic categories which can appear in that position include a direct or indirect object, the determiner of either a direct or indirect object (the result of discontinuous DPs in Iquito), an adverb, or a predicative adjective.

To provide a formal syntactic analysis of this phenomenon, it is insufficient to simply describe the word order, but to determine the corresponding hierarchical and featural structure. To do this, I first provide a description of the basic syntax of Iquito. It is significant to the analysis of RS that the subject and verb are obligatorily adjacent in realis clauses, indicating a Spec-Head relationship.

(2)[2]   a. Iyarácata iyásiica itii-Ø.
            quickly   grass   burn.IMPF-ECTNS
           "The grass burns quickly"
         b. Iyásiica itii-Ø   iyarácata.
            grass   burn.IMPF-ECTNS   quickly
         c. *Iyásiica iyarácata itii-Ø
             grass   quickly   burn.IMPF-ECTNS

I show that a V2 analysis of Iquito, of the kind described for German, does not hold, based on data from negation and topicalization, which result in the verb possibly following both the subject and a negator or topicalized element. Further, I argue that there are two EPP movements which are always at play in Iquito, regardless of RS: the external argument's movement to Spec, TP, and the movement of a lower syntactic element to Spec, *v*P. Items that can satisfy the Spec, *v*P EPP are direct or indirect objects or their determiners, adverbs, and predicative adjectives, the same set of elements that descriptively fill the immediately preverbal position in irrealis clauses.

The only existing formal analysis of the syntax of Iquito irrealis is Hansen (2011), who argues, based on markedness, that the syntax of realis clauses is underlying and that irrealis must be derived from the realis word order. To accomplish this, she claims that the irrealis element X must raise, mapping realis SVX to irrealis SXV. There are multiple potential problems with this approach. Firstly, she assumes that every element that can serve as the irrealis element is part of a natural class of phrases. Additionally, she does not provide explicit phrase structure representations indicating where this X element is moving from or to, except to say that it "most likely moves to an irrealis position that exists between the subject and verb of an irrealis clause, but that is absent in realis clauses" (Hansen 2011: 194). This in turn entails that realis and irrealis clauses are by hypothesis different in the phrasal structure they project. I instead propose an

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[1] Abbreviations: ECTNS extended current tense, IPFV imperfective, PFV perfective
[2] The data in (2) come from personal fieldwork conducted in 2014.

analysis in which the RS distinction is realized by the movement of the verb to a higher position (realis) or its failure to move (irrealis), allowing for both RS possibilities to be derived from the same underlying structure.

The (lack of) movement of the verb is couched in Ritter and Wiltschko's (2009, 2014) Parametric Substantiation Hypothesis, which states that "the substantive content of a given functional category is subject to parametric variation, constrained only by the universally determined core function of that category" (Ritter and Wiltschko 2009: 156). As such, they argue that the INFL functional projection of a given language is subject to language-specific content, such that all finite clauses display an obligatory contrast in that content in the INFL projection (e.g. LOCATION in Halkomelem, PERSON in Blackfoot).

I argue that, in Iquito, INFL is substantiated by RS. This follows from the diagnostics put forth by Ritter and Wiltschko, namely that the content substantiated by INFL is: unique (allowing for only one iteration of INFL in a given clause), obligatory (required in a finite clause), can be phonologically uninterpreted, and shows an interaction with COMP (the contrast is realized only in finite clauses). I show that all these criteria are met in Iquito for the RS distinction.

The same syntactic contrast appears to hold in embedded clauses with overt subjects also, where (3a) shows the irrealis word order, and (3b) shows the realis word order. In these embedded clauses, the verb raising is also accompanied by a benefactive marker, an aspect of an areal feature of infinitives having some nominal properties.

(3)   a. Caa quí=nacarɨɨ-yaa-Ø   [cu-arámaaja   iina   amuu   cúni]
           NEG 1SG=want-IPFV-ECTNS   1SG-brother   DET   kill   snake
        b. Caa quí=nacarɨɨ-yaa-Ø   [cu-arámaaja   amuu-ni-iira   iina   cúni]
           NEG 1SG=want-IPFV-ECTNS   1SG-brother   kill-INF-BEN   DET   snake
           "I don't want my brother to kill the snake"

The proposed verb movement approach solves the problems confronted by Hansen's approach. Firstly, it does not rely on movement of an element X (the so-called irrealis element) to a position that appears in all and only irrealis clauses. Rather, the realization of a clause as realis or irrealis is dependent on the movement of a single syntactic object, the movement of which is determined by the features of an INFL projection substantiated by RS.

This analysis has important implications for RS in general, especially considering that Iquito is the only language which has been documented as displaying an RS distinction purely syntactically with no accompanying morphological marking, providing further evidence of what is possible regarding cross-linguistic variation in human languages. Further investigation of this phenomenon will also inform historical investigations of the rapidly disappearing Zaparoan language family, since other related languages show morphologically marked irrealis (e.g. Arabela).

Selected References:

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