

The Preterit Mode and Counterfactuality in Ojibwe

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Roadmap

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Data and Sources

Speakers

- Six L1 Nishnaabemwin (Ojibwe) speakers
- Odaawaa and Eastern Ojibwe dialects from the Lake Huron communities of Waasaaksing, Chimnising, and Wiikwemkoong
- Interviews conducted throughout 2019 and 2020

Texts

- Bloomfield (1957): Eastern Ojibwa grammatical sketch, texts, and word list
- Nichols (1980): Ojibwe Morphology
- Valentine (2001): Nishnaabemwin Reference Grammar

Key Findings

- The Ojibwe *preterit mode* has varying functions
 - Temporal-ish interpretation in independent order
 - but is not a past tense marker
 - Counterfactual use in the conjunct
 - temporal interpretation is not seen in counterfactuals
- Counterfactuality in Ojibwe patterns with counterfactuality cross-linguistically
 - Supports the view that the preterit mode is a counterfactual marker
 - Provides window to next steps for further investigation

Counterfactuality

- Essentially, *a statement a speaker believes to be contrary to fact*
- Found in **wishes** and **conditionals**
 - wishes convey a speaker's desire for things to be different from the actual world
 - conditionals can convey counterfactuality

Counterfactuality

Past tense and *imperfective aspect* are common counterfactual marking strategies.

- English: past tense
 - I wish I **was** rich
- Hindi: imperfective aspect

(1) agar Ram phal khaa-taa (*hai/*thaa)
if Ram fruit ate-**hab** PRS/PST
'If Ram ate the fruit (CF), ..'
(Bhatt 1997)

Counterfactuality

Other counterfactual marking strategies (Nevins 2002)

- Burmese: *spatial displacement operator*
 - functions similar to past tense and imperfective aspect in other languages.
- Specific *counterfactual complementizers*
 - Chinese, Tagalog, Slovenian, Hebrew, and Turkish

What is the Ojibwe *Preterit Mode*?

- Realized morphologically as *-ban* and variants
- Terminology suggests past tense
 - Implicated in what Baraga (1878) called *imperfect* and *pluperfect* tenses
 - Bloomfield (1957) uses the term *preterit*
- Nichols (1980: 121-123):
 - Independent order: contrasts prior events and action with subsequent non-occurrence (or vice-versa in negative environments)
 - Conjunct: indicates *unlikely, unrealized, and counterfactual* events and action

Aaniin wenji-nanda-gikendamaan?

- “-*bans*” are tough for learners to grasp!
 - Varied and nebulous uses
- So let’s look at the **functions**...

Preterit Mode - Independent

Without tense marking **situates an event in the past** (and is not true to the present):

- (2) *Niniibawinaaban.*
ni-niibawi-naaban
1SG-is.standing-**PRET**
'I was standing.'
(Bloomfield 1957: 45)

Preterit Mode - Independent

Past tense *gii-* affixed on a preterit verb specifies that the **past action was concluded in the past** (and is not true at the present):

- (3) *Mewinzha ningii-izhichigenaabaan.*
mewinzha nin-gii-izhichige-naabaan
long.ago 1SG-PST-do.it-**PRET**
'It was so long ago that I did that (and not since).'
(Nichols 1980: 122)

Preterit Mode - Independent

With a prospective *wii-* prefix, the **intention** conveyed is **placed in the past**:

- (4) *Niwii-wijjiwaabaneg.*
ni-wii-wijjiw-aaban-eg
1SG-FUT-accompany.h/-**PRET**-3PL
'I had wanted to go with them (but didn't).'
(Nichols 1980: 122)

Preterit Mode - Conjunct

When unmarked for tense: **counterfactual!** The speaker believes the situation to be counter to fact:

(5) *Noongom isa go biidawipan...*

noongom isa go biidaw-ipan
today EMPH EMPH bring(it).for.h/-**CONJ.PRET**.3SG>>1SG

‘Had he brought it for me today (but he didn’t)...’

(Nichols 1980: 124)

Preterit Mode - Conjunct

With future tense marking, the Ojibwe preterit in the conjunct conveys **unlikelihood**:

- (6) *Nindaano-gii-gagwedwe kaye ji-wiigibijigaadepan.*
nin-daano-gii-gagwedwe kaye ji-wiigibijigaade-pan.
1SG-in.vain-PST-ask and **FUT-it.is.moved-3SG.CONJ.PRET**
'I have been asking in vain that it be moved (but it won't be).'
(Nichols 1980: 122)

- Not counterfactual but a future less vivid (FLV) construction that cross-linguistically often exhibits counterfactual morphology

Optatives - Overview

Previous investigation looked into variety of strategies for optative, e.g. *hope* or *wish* constructions.

- Optative particles
 - *begish naa* + conjunct clause
 - *gesnaa* + conjunct clause
 - Lexical verb constructions
 - desiderative predicate + conjunct clause
- All were found to contain **CONJ.PRET** morphology in **counterfactual** optatives

Optatives - Counterfactual

A *wish* construction is exemplary in conveying counterfactuality as it conveys a speaker's desire for things to be different from the way they actually are:

(7) *Begish naa kchitwaawziwaambaanh.*

begish naa kchitwaawziw-aambaanh

OPT EMPH be.rich-1SG.**CONJ.PRET**

'I wish I was rich.'

Optatives - Counterfactual

Other optative constructions pattern with preterit counterfactual marking:

(8) *Gesnaa niibna zhoonyaans yaamaambaa.*

gesnaa	niibna	zhoonyaans	yaam-aambaa
OPT	lots	money	have.it-1SG. CONJ.PRET

‘I wish I was rich.’ (lit.: ‘I wish I had lots of money’)

Pattern is also seen in constructions not utilizing optative particles:

(9) *Ndaa-kchinendam ji-zhoonyaakeyaambaan.*

n-daa-kchinendam	ji-zhoonyaake-yaambaan
1SG-MOD-be.happy	FUT-make.money-1SG. CONJ.PRET

‘I wish I was rich.’ (lit.: ‘I’d be happy to make lots of money.’)

Optatives - Counterfactual vs Non-Counterfactual

Presence of preterit conveys counterfactuality:

(10) *Begish naa bkinaageyaan.*

begish naa bkinaage-**yaan**

OPT EMPH win-1SG.**CONJ**

‘I **hope** I win.’

(11) *Begish naa bkinaageyaambaa.*

begish naa bkinaage-**yaambaa**

OPT EMPH win-1SG.**CONJ.PRET**

‘I **wish** I would win

→ Lexical ambiguity of *begish naa* between *hope* and *wish* is conveyed via preterit morphology

Counterfactual Conditionals

A non-counterfactual conditional does not utilize preterit morphology:

(12) *Da-mno-yaa giishpin mshkiki daapnang.*

da-mno-yaa	giishpin	mshkiki	daapnan-g
FUT-good-be.3SG	if	medicine	pick.up-3SG.CONJ

‘If he takes this medicine, he will be well.’

While a counterfactual conditional does:

(13) *Daa-mno-yaa daapnamgobne.*

daa-mno-yaa	daapnam-gobne	mshkiki.
MOD-good-be.3SG	pick.up-3SG. CONJ.PRET/DUB	medicine

‘If he took this medicine/had he taken this medicine, he would be well.’

Theoretical Discussion

- Iatridou (2000)
 - Past tense morphology is responsible for conveying counterfactuality
 - **Exclusion feature (ExclF)** is carried by past tense morphology
 - depending upon context can range over **times** or **worlds**
 - Imperfective aspect commonly appears in counterfactuals
- Nevins (2002)
 - The spatial displacement operator seen in Burmese functions similar to past tense and imperfective aspect in other languages.
 - Suggests that an **exclusion operator**, like Iatridou's **ExclF** is at work here.

Theoretical Discussion

- Bjorkman and Halpert (2017)
 - Cross-linguistic pervasiveness of **past tense** and **imperfective aspect** morphology marking counterfactuals
 - Languages employ one or the other but can appear to utilize both in portmanteau morphology
 - Underspecification analysis:
 - PST or IMPV morphology can be **underspecified** for tense in a counterfactual
 - one or the other is in effect illusory, leaving either past tense or imperfective aspect to be the sole bearer of counterfactuality

Theoretical Discussion - Iatridou (2000)

- Exclusion feature: $T(x)$ excludes $C(x)$
 - $T(x)$ refers to the topic being spoken of and $C(x)$ the x “that for all we know is the x of the speaker.” (Iatridou 2000: 246)
- Ranging over times, t : T topic time, C utterance time
 - Excludes utterance time
 - As English past tense: “I was rich”
- Ranging over worlds, w : T topic worlds, C actual world
 - Excludes actual world
 - As a counterfactual marker in English: “I wish I was rich”

Interpretation of the Preterit

The independent preterit unmarked for tense can have a **past imperfective interpretation** as in example (2):

- *Niniibawinaaban.* - 'I was standing.' (Bloomfield 1957: 45)

This contrasts with **simple past** tense reading conveyed by prefixal past tense marker *gii-* on the independent verb in the absence of preterit morphology:

- (14) *Ngii-nmadbimi.*
n-gii-nmadbi-mi
1SG-PST-is.sitting-1PL
'We (excl.) sat.'
(Valentine 2001: 531)

Interpretation of the Preterit

Past tense *gii-* affixed on a preterit verb also gives a reading of **past imperfective** action:

- (3) *Mewinzha ningii-izhichigenaabaan.*
mewinzha nin-gii-izhichige-naabaan
long.ago 1SG-PST-do.it-PRET
'It was so long ago that I did that (and not since).'
(Nichols 1980: 122)

Interpretation of the Preterit

With a prospective *wii-* suffix, the intention conveyed by such morphology is placed in the past while retaining an **imperfective** reading:

- (4) *Niwii-wijjiwaabaneg.*
ni-wii-wijjiw-aaban-eg
1SG-FUT-accompany.h/-PRET-3PL
'I had wanted to go with them (but didn't).'
(Nichols 1980: 122)

Interpretation of the Preterit

→ The preterit mode has a wide variety of **temporal and aspectual interpretations**

ExclF and the Preterit (Iatridou)

Iatridou's **ExclF** may apply to the Ojibwe preterit mode

- In the independent order:
 - Ranging over **times**: T topic time, C utterance time
 - *Niniibawinaaban.* - 'I was standing.' (Bloomfield 1957: 45)
- In the conjunct order:
 - Ranging over **worlds**: T topic worlds, C actual world
 - *Noongom isa go biidawipan...* - 'Had he brought it for me today (but he didn't)...'
(Nichols 1980: 124)

Underspecification and the Preterit (Bjorkman and Halpert)

Preterit mode may be a **portmanteau past/imperfective morpheme**

- *Niniibawinaaban.* - 'I was standing.' (Bloomfield 1957: 45)

It is **underspecified** for tense in that its use in counterfactuals can be temporally ambiguous

(13) *Begish naa daabaan yaawagba.*

Begish naa daabaan (*gii-/ *gaa-)yaaw-agba

OPT EMPH car (PST/IC.PST)have.h/-1SG>>3SG.CONJ.PRET

'I wish I had a car.' / 'I wish I had had a car.'

Summary

- Ojibwe employs preterit morphology to convey counterfactuality
- Preterit morphology as a counterfactual marker conveys a semantic nuance between hoping and wishing in lexically ambiguous optative particle *begish*
- Conditionals exhibit preterit morphology when the speaker believes an antecedent to be untrue or unlikely

Summary

- Typology of counterfactuality shows a cross-linguistic tendency toward marking counterfactuality with tense and aspect morphology
 - This may also be the case in Ojibwe
- Bjorkman and Halpert predict that languages which use portmanteau past/imperfective morphology in CFs are in fact actually specified for one
 - There is evidence that this is the case in Ojibwe
- Iatridou describes an exclusion feature that conveys counterfactuality cross-linguistically
 - Concept of ExclF fits well with the Ojibwe preterit mode

Conclusions

- The Ojibwe *preterit mode* is employed as a marker of counterfactuality
- Counterfactuality in Ojibwe patterns with counterfactuality cross-linguistically
 - Supports the view that the preterit mode is a counterfactual marker
 - Provides window to next steps for deeper investigation

Next Steps

- Investigate interactions with tense marking
 - Functions in independent order fairly straightforward
 - Conjunct is another story
 - ji- and ge- (changed conjunct future and voluntative) expressing hypothetical and unlikely situations
 - Past tense on a counterfactual CONJ.PRET construction is deemed ungrammatical

Miigwech!

Thank you!

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