Highlights of the MelaTAMP projects—methods and results

In the MelaTAMP project, we have been investigating tense, aspect, modality and polarity in seven Oceanic languages of Melanesia since 2016. In this talk, we would like to highlight which methods we have been using in our research and how they relate to our results.

Language	*stay*	Redup.	Impf.
Daakaka	+	+	−
Nafsan	+	−	−
Mav̌ea	+	+	+
Saliba-Logea	−	+	−

1) In our work on **habitual aspect in four Oceanic languages** (accepted, joined work with two more authors), we look primarily at corpora from language documentation on Nafsan (South Efate), Saliba-Logea, Mavea and Daakaka to find out how they express habituality.

Methods

- We exhausted existing descriptions and results of previously conducted questionnaires such as Dahl (1985).
- We then identified target contexts in the corpora a) by looking for keywords such as *used to*, *usually*, *always* in the English translations, and b) based on a set of stories which were present in several languages, which we knew to contain specific habitual contexts.
- We imported the corpus data into ANNIS, for optimal search facilities.

Results

- Three out of four languages had cognate continuous auxiliaries related to full verbs meaning *stay*, which were frequently used in habitual contexts.
- Mavea has an additional imperfective affix, which also featured prominently in expressing habituality.
- Three out of four languages used reduplication in order to express habitual aspect.
- Those two languages that used both reduplication and imperfective or continuous aspect marking to express habituality sometimes combined both structures. The combination of these two elements was exclusive to habitual contexts.
- Both realis and irrealis are compatible with habitual contexts.

2) In our article on **mapping irreality in six Vanuatu languages** (accepted with two other authors), we investigated the relation between tense and modality by focussing on counterfactual future contexts as in *If were to win the lottery tomorrow, I would take a vacation.* We investigated whether these contexts patterned with counterfactual conditionals of the past (*If I had won the lottery, I would have taken a vacation*), or with indicative conditionals of the future (*If I win the lottery, I will take a vacation*). We took the results as an indication whether each language prioritized the modal domain (counterfactuality) or the temporal domain (future) in these contexts.

Methods: We used storyboards, some of which we designed ourselves specifically for this study, to elicit counterfactual future conditionals and minimal contrasts to counterfactual past conditionals and indicative future conditionals.

Results: Languages show remarkable variation in how they carve out the modal-temporal semantic space, which we modeled with a branching-time framework.
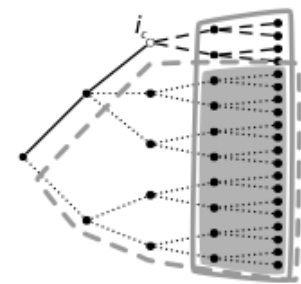

Figure 1: The counterfactual future (shaded gray) as the intersection between the future (solid outline) and the counterfactual (dashed outline)