

The Irrealis Category in rGyalrong*

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This study offers fresh evidence for reality status as a cross-linguistic gram-type from rGyalrong (Tibeto-Burman, northwestern Sichuan), where it is a full-fledged, uniformly marked inflectional category. The *irrealis* verb form comprises a non-past verb stem plus the prefix *v-* (IRR₁) in combination with a perfectivity-marking orientation prefix (IRR₂). Aside from occurring in prototypical contexts of irrealis semantics, verbs in the irrealis denote differential actualizing potentials between ordinary imperative and future (realis) versus postponed imperative, jussive, and dubitative future (irrealis). Also explored is a realis verbal formation sharing a particular chunk of irrealis morphology, namely the prefix *v-*, which once may have served a unified function of marking the speaker's attenuated assertion. Close parallelisms between divergent dialects of rGyalrong establish irrealis as a pan-dialectal morphosyntactic trait with deep roots in the rGyalrong language.

Key words: Tibeto-Burman, rGyalrong, verbal morphology, reality status

1. Introduction

Realis and irrealis represent a central modal distinction attested in a growing

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number of verb systems. In one view, the realis mode applies to situations whose actuality (or reality) is directly *asserted* by the speaker, whereas the irrealis applies to situations about which no such assertion is made (Bybee 1998:267-268). Alternatively, the realis mode may be viewed as neutral, whereas ‘irrealis expresses a lack of conviction about the event (ranging from doubt to knowledge to the contrary)’ (Chung & Timberlake 1985:245). In any event, there is consensus that the relevant distinctions are communicatively oriented and have more to do with the speaker’s subjective attitude than with objective reality (Givón 1994:268-269, Bybee 1998:268). Further, all notionally irrealis situations are not marked uniformly as irrealis across different languages; rather, there appears to be a cross-linguistic spectrum of more or less ‘irrealis’ grammatical contexts. For instance, counterfactuals should qualify as irrealis contexts par excellence, since they are intentionally selected by speakers to depict situations that flatly contradict what is known to be real. Indeed, counterfactuals and predictive conditionals are classified as irrealis in most languages with distinct irrealis morphology. On the other hand, construction types such as futures, imperatives, polar interrogatives, negated clauses, and habituais are less solidly irrealis, and may show variation even among dialects of the same language.¹ Before hastening to label a marker as ‘irrealis’, above all, the linguist must “provide sufficient evidence that it does indeed represent the non-actualization of Irrealis mood in a variety of contexts...rather than the temporal deixis of future tense” (Mithun 1995:386). Thus, a future marker in a purported tense system with a future vs. non-future opposition would be justifiably reinterpreted as marking ‘irrealis’ only if this can be shown to apply to an additional range of non-actual events, such as counterfactuals in the case of Northern Qiang (CL Huang 2000:16), deontic mood and potential verb complements in the case of Lakota (Chung & Timberlake 1985:206), or certain types of epistemic mood and potential complements in the case of Burmese (Comrie 1985:50-51).

In light of Mithun’s sensible counsel, this study will aim to provide a detailed demonstration that prototypical irrealis is a valid verbal category in the rGyalrong language² (northwestern Sichuan; Tibeto-Burman family). rGyalrong, like many other

¹ For instance, irrealis negative clauses in one dialect (Mesa Grande) of Diegueño came to be reclassified as realis in another dialect (Jamul) as a result of historical change (Mithun 1995: 383-384).

² Spoken by around 150,000 agricultural Tibetans residing in ten counties in northwestern Sichuan, this is a language with remarkable internal diversity with at least three mutually unintelligible dialects: Situ (eastern), Sidaba (northwestern), and Chabao (northeastern). The Sidaba dialect in turn subdivides into two distinct sub-dialects, Caodeng and Showu. rGyalrong, together with two neighboring languages Lavrung and Horpa, form a compact *rGyalrongic* subgroup in Tibeto-Burman (J. Sun 2000a, b). For a succinct description of the linguistic structures of the Caodeng dialect of rGyalrong, see J. Sun (2003).

Tibeto-Burman languages of the Himalayas, is characterized by abundant derivational as well as inflectional morphology. Among other things, the rGyalrong verb inflects for two main modal categories, evidentiality and irrealis. In previous publications on rGyalrong, evidentials fail to receive a coherent analysis, while the existence of an independent irrealis category has gone completely unnoticed despite its conspicuous presence. Although the ensuing discussion will focus on the Sidaba dialect of rGyalrong, especially its Caodeng subdialect (hereafter: Caodeng), the relevant observations are in large measure extendable to other rGyalrong dialects.

The main presentation below starts with an overview of the richly developed system of verbal inflection in Caodeng (§2), followed by an analysis of the morphological makeup of the irrealis verb form (§3). The distribution and semantic interpretations of the irrealis verb form in a range of Caodeng construction types are discussed in §4. A related *realis* verb formation is then introduced that, surprisingly at first blush, also manifests an important component of the irrealis morphology (§5). Summarizing the main findings of this study, the concluding section highlights the semantic commonalities between all the construction types under study and posits the irrealis category as a pan-dialectal grammatical feature of rGyalrong, on the strength of comparative material from two other major dialects of the language.

2. Overview of Caodeng verbal inflection

Caodeng verbs are highly inflected, with prominent verb-stem differentiation. All verbs in Caodeng distinguish a verb base or STEM 1 and a marked STEM 2 which, aside from indicating past-time reference in the perfective and imperfective past verb forms, is also required in the low-transitivity continuous aspect (see further on), a variety of converbs, as well as oblique deverbal nouns. Additionally, many common transitive verbs show a distinct STEM 3, or singular transitive non-past stem.³ The inflectional categories of the verb include person-number, direction, orientation, transitivity, tense-aspect, and evidentiality.

Core arguments get cross-referenced on the verb by means of person-number markers. The various person-number indexes in intransitive sentences are displayed in the following paradigm (where Σ = verb stem):

³ A systematic comparison of verb-stem formation in the various rGyalrong dialects is given in J. Sun (2004). The marked stems (STEM 2 and STEM 3) are indicated with subscript numerals in the glosses.

Table 1: Caodeng person-number markers on intransitive verbs

	1	2	3
SG	Σ -aŋ	tə- Σ	Ø
DL	Σ -tsə	tə- Σ - ⁿ dzə	Σ - ⁿ dzə
PL	Σ -jə	tə- Σ -nə	Σ -nə

The same paradigm applies to transitive verbs with inanimate undergoers. In transitive sentences involving animate undergoers, person marking follows the dictates of an *empathy hierarchy* (Silverstein 1976, J. Sun & Shi 2002). Specifically, the various argument configurations are sub-classified into local (1>2 and 2>1), parallel (3>3), and disparate (1, 2 interacting with 3) types. In local and parallel configurations, the argument cross-referenced on the verb is always the undergoer and actor, respectively. In disparate scenarios, however, the verb indexes the higher-ranking argument on the hierarchy, irrespective of semantic role. The verb may optionally index both the actor and undergoer arguments when a first-person interacts with a third party.

The category ‘direction’ marks the relative place of actor and undergoer arguments on the aforementioned empathy hierarchy (DeLancey 1981). Scenarios where the actor is lower on the hierarchy than the undergoer are marked as inverse with the prefix *o-*. The two local configurations also receive distinct marking: *tə-* for 1>2 and *ko-* (interchangeable with *to-*) for 2>1.

A salient trait in rGyalrong morphosyntax is the category of *orientation*, or spatial grounding. Three distinct subsystems are at work, each of which comprises two opposing terms: vertical (up vs. down), riverine (upstream vs. downstream), and solar (east vs. west). By metaphorical extension, the riverine subsystem acquires an obliquely upward vs. obliquely downward as well as an inside vs. outside interpretation, at least in the Caodeng dialect. Likewise, the solar subsystem is metaphorically extended for conveying a toward-center vs. away-from-center opposition. In addition to orientational adverbials and pronouns, there is a whole array of verbal orientation prefixes, a basic set of which is displayed below:

Table 2: Basic Caodeng orientation prefixes

up	down	upstream	downstream	eastward	westward
tə-	nə-	lɐ-	tʰɐ-	kə-	nə-

Required on all perfective, imperfective non-past, and imperative verb forms, orientation markers do multiple duties, coding aspect, imperativity, reality status (see further on), as well as spatial deixis *per se*. With non-motion verbs, the selection of collocating

orientation prefixes is largely conventionalized.

The verb is highly sensitive to transitivity. Apart from ablaut, additional morphological devices are available for indicating transitivity. In perfective and imperfective past sentences with a third-person actor, transitivity is marked by *e* vocalism in the orientation prefixes. In direct non-past sentences with a singular non-first-person actor, moreover, an optional transitivity marker *-j* attaches itself to verb stems containing no coda other than the glottal stop (e.g. *jə-tə-qʰvʔ(-j)* ‘you will dislike it’; *jə-tə-tʰe(-j)* ‘you will drink it’). For yet another transitivity-related distinction, see §5.3 below.

Caodeng has grammaticalized absolute tense, with a clear past and non-past contrast in the imperfective aspect. The unmarked tense is the simple present, which, as in many languages, has a wide range of uses including gnomic, habitual, as well as future (e.g. *tʰe-aŋ* ‘I drink; I will drink’). There is also a *prospective* in *jə-* (e.g. *jə-tʰe-aŋ* ‘I am about to drink’), which is not bound to the moment of speech but is also appropriate for indicating, with the perfective verb, the meaning ‘almost’ (e.g. *jə-nə-set-aŋ* ‘I almost died’). The viewpoint-aspect contrast between imperfective and perfective is deeply entrenched in Caodeng grammar, marked by different stem choices as well as orientation/aspectual prefixes. The interaction between tense and aspect yields two past tenses in this language: the perfective denoting completed actions and processes and changed states (e.g. *nə-tʰi-aŋ* ‘I drank’; *tə-steʔ-aŋ* ‘I woke up’), and the imperfective past denoting on-going situations existing prior to the moment of speech (e.g. *nə-tʰi-aŋ* ‘I was drinking’). Both the perfect and the imperfective past express certain *perfect* meanings, relating past situations to the moment of speech. In particular, the imperfective past is also pressed into service to denote *perfect of persistent situations* (e.g. *nə-tʰi-aŋ* ‘I have been drinking’), and *experiential perfect* by the perfective form of the complement-taking verb *rɲiʔ* ‘to experience’ (e.g. *kə-tʰi nə-rɲi-aŋ* ‘I have drunk (...before)’). The perfective, however, can also function as a *relative past* in temporal and conditional clauses with future temporal reference. Several other aspectual categories figure in verb inflection. The *imperfective non-past* has a predominant present-habitual reading (e.g. *nə-tʰe-aŋ* ‘I drink; I am drinking (...these days)’). There are also two distinct *continuous-aspect* formations, distinguished by degrees of transitivity (see §5.3 below). Events that recur with regularity can be expressed by the present, or by adding to it a habitual prefix *ⁿge-* (e.g. *tʰe-aŋ*; *ⁿgə-tʰe-aŋ* ‘I am in the habit of drink’). This marked habitual form applies also to recurring events in the past.

The evidential system consists of a mediative (indirect evidence/mirative/hearsay) *-cə* and a hearsay *tə-tsə-nə* (literally: ‘they are saying’).⁴ Illocutionary force is expressed partly through verb inflection and partly through a host of sentence-final particles.

⁴ In the Situ dialect, a conceptually similar system is found encoded by widely disparate morphological material (YJ Lin 2000).

3. Irrealis morphology in Caodeng

Compared with other languages with a grammaticalized irrealis distinction, Caodeng exhibits an uncommonly straightforward representation of this modal category, utilizing uniform morphological material for marking off some of the most typical regions in the irrealis conceptual space.

The irrealis verb form is constructed by attaching to STEM 1 or (with stem-alternating transitive verbs in the singular) STEM 3 a prefix complex consisting of the prefix *v*-⁵ preceding an appropriate orientation prefix. Irrealis verb forms inflect for person, number, and polarity, but lack all tense-aspect distinctions. Third-person singular (1a), plural (1b), and negated (1c-d) irrealis formations are illustrated below with the verbs *ⁿdze* ‘to eat’ and *tʰi* ‘to drink’:

- (1) a. **Singular Irrealis**
v-tə-ⁿdze *v-nə-tʰi*
 IRR₁-IRR₂-eat₃ IRR₁-IRR₂-drink₃
- b. **Plural Irrealis**
v-tə-ⁿdze-nə *v-nə-tʰi-nə*
 IRR₁-IRR₂-eat-2/3PL IRR₁-IRR₂-drink-2/3PL
- c. **Negated Singular Irrealis**
v-mə-tə-ⁿdze *v-mə-nə-tʰi*
 IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-eat₃ IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-drink₃
- d. **Negated Plural Irrealis**
v-mə-tə-ⁿdze-nə *v-mə-nə-tʰi-nə*
 IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-eat-2/3PL IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-drink-2/3PL

Neutralization of tense-aspect specifications in the irrealis is shown in (2) below:

- (2) a. *formε* *təmu* *v-mə-nə-wi* *ne-nrewe-aŋ*
 last.night rain IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂:DOWN-come IMPFV-hope-1SG
 ‘I hope it did not rain last night.’
- b. *pəfkʰo* *təmu* *v-mə-nə-wi* *ne-nrewe-aŋ*
 now rain IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂:DOWN-come IMPFV-hope-1SG
 ‘I hope it is not raining now.’
- c. *fəʃfsi* *təmu* *v-mə-nə-wi* *ne-nrewe-aŋ*
 tomorrow rain IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂:DOWN-come IMPFV-hope-1SG
 ‘I hope it will not rain tomorrow.’

⁵ Akin perhaps to a distinct but related usage of the prefix *v*- (see §5).

As shown in (1c-d) and (2) above, the formative *v-* and the orientation prefix are separable, distinct parts of irrealis morphology, hence their respective glossing as IRR₁ and IRR₂. It seems possible to account for the integration of an orientation prefix IRR₂ in the irrealis formation. First of all, a major function of verbal orientation prefixes in rGyalrong grammar is to code perfectivity, which is readily explicable in view of the cross-linguistic tendency for directional terms to develop a perfectivizing effect by making a process telic or bounded (Bybee & Dahl 1989:85-86). Further, Chung & Timberlake (1985:256-257) observe that non-actual modality (particularly the deontic mode) also tends to induce the perfective aspect; for instance, in Tagalog (as in Caodeng) imperatives are always in the perfective aspect.⁶ Likewise, the imperative verb stem in Classical Tibetan, in addition to showing a distinct vowel grade *-o-*, is marked with the same suffix *-s* as the perfective stem. Analogous phenomena showing perfective marking in conditional clauses are also attested in various neighboring Tibeto-Burman languages, such as Lavrung and Horpa (personal research), Muya (BF Huang 1991:131), Southern Qiang (HK Sun 1981:143, 174), and Tibetan. This can be seen in (3) and (4) below, respectively from the Geshiza dialect of Horpa (Duo'erji 1998:119) and Lhasa Tibetan (Wang 1994:460):

- (3) *ŋa* ***dv-ntso*** *tɕʰathə* *ŋə-ke* *sŋi-n*
 1SG PFV-have₂ if 2SG-OBJ lend-2SG
 'If I had it, I would lend it to you.'
- (4) *charpa* ***btang-na*** *gnamgru* *phur* *thub-kyi.ma.red*
 rain fall:PFV-SUB airplane fly be.able-be:PROS:NEG
 'If it rains, the plane will not be able to take off.'

To recapitulate, irrealis marking in Caodeng is carried out holistically by the formative *v-* (IRR₁, see further on) in combination with a perfectivizing orientation prefix (IRR₂), and the occurrence of the latter as part of irrealis morphology is motivated by cross-linguistic tendencies in aspect-modality interactions.

4. Irrealis constructions in Caodeng

4.1 Predictive and imaginative conditionals

Predictive and imaginative conditionals are identical in reality-status marking. In both types, the condition clause (protasis) is marked as irrealis, whereas the consequent

⁶ Russian subordinate complement clauses in the subjunctive mood are also marked with the perfective aspect (Noonan 1985:52).

clause (apodosis) occurs in the realis. Examples of predictive (5) and imaginative (6) conditionals are:

- (5) a. *osto v-nv-tə-rvzjaŋ-nə? nv-səqə po-aŋ*
 hard IRR₁-IRR₂-2-study-SUB 2SG:POSS-reward do₃-1SG
 ‘If you study hard, I will reward you.’
- b. *neji? taci?-naŋ v-nv-tə-nəmder-nə? vji?-ntʃʰon nəmder-aŋ*
 2SG water-inside IRR₁-IRR₂:DOWN-2-jump-SUB 1SG-also jump-1SG
 ‘If you jump into the water, I will jump too.’
- (6) a. *dzomə v-mə-nə-set-nə? nv-vde?*
 Droma IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-die-SUB IMPFV:PST-be.good₂
 ‘It would have been good if Droma had not died.’
- b. *for? ɛ-ber-z foχkor v-nə-to?-nə?*
 yesterday 1SG:POSS-body-LOC money IRR₁-IRR₂-exist-SUB
nənə? srənla? tə-χtu?-aŋ fte?
 that ring PFV-buy₂-1SG be:EMPH
 ‘If I had had money with me yesterday, I would have bought that ring.’

Note that in the counterfactual situations described in (6), past-time reference can be specified only in the main-clause verbs; the irrealis protasis verbs remain invariable.

Besides these ‘unreality’ (predictive and imaginative) conditionals (Thompson & Longacre 1985:190-191), Caodeng uses other types of conditional structures. Thus, conditional clauses referring to general truths tend to occur in the imperfective non-past (e.g. (7a-c)) instead of in the irrealis, whereas ‘reality’ conditionals (e.g. (8)) require fully inflected verb forms, ruling out the irrealis structure altogether:

- (7) a. *fɔrom?-kə təlepɔ? te-ⁿdze-nə?*
 hornet-ERG forehead IMPFV-bite₃-SUB
ɛʒonu-kə ɽjénk^{hət} tə-kə-lêt jermə mŋəm? ké-tsə tʃʰoz?
 youth-ERG fist PFV-NMLZ-hit₂ almost hurt GHA⁷-say be.the.rule
 ‘It is said that if a hornet bites one on the forehead, it will hurt like being punched by the fist of a young man.’
- b. *qəpre? ⁿge-kv-mje-nə? kv-o-ⁿdze*
 snake IMPFV-GHA-grab-SUB GHA-INV-bite
 ‘If one grabs a snake, it bites one.’

⁷ The prefix *kv-* here represents *generic human arguments*, i.e. ‘people in general’. Cf. J. Sun (2005).

- c. *vlɛme ⁿge-kv-mti?-nə? ne-kv-zwaɿɾɛ? tʃʰoz?*
 lama IMPFV-GHA-see-SUB IMPFV-GHA-act.prudently be.the.rule
 ‘One conducts oneself prudently if one sees a lama.’
- (8) a. *tətʰu-naŋ tɛjmoɣ tə-kv-sqɐ?-nə?*
 pot-inside mushroom PFV-NMLZ:OBJ-boil₂-SUB
*tə-ʋsɐ-ⁿdze/*v-tə-tə-ⁿdze qʰónə pəʃkʰo rɛpɲəm tə-znəɐ*
 2-CONT:HTR-eat/*IRR₁-IRR₂-2-eat₃ then now EMPH 2-stop₃
 ‘If you are eating boiled mushrooms in the pot, stop (eating them) right now!’
- b. *tətʰu-naŋ tɛjmoɣ tə-kv-sqɐ?-nə? jə-tə-ⁿdze/*v-tə-tə-ⁿdze*
 pot-inside mushroom PFV-NMLZ:OBJ-boil₂-SUB PROS-2-eat₃/*IRR₁-IRR₂-2-eat₃
qʰónə mə-tə-tə-ⁿdze
 then NEG-IMP-2-eat₃
 ‘If you are about to eat boiled mushrooms in the pot, don’t eat them!’
- c. *ʃqʰɐ? tətʰu-naŋ tɛjmoɣ tə-tə-ⁿdze/*v-tə-tə-ⁿdze*
 just.now pot-inside mushroom PFV-2-eat₂/*IRR₁-IRR₂-2-eat₃
qʰónə káde nɐ-xto? mɣəm?
 then in.a.while 2SG:POSS-belly ache
 ‘If you ate the mushrooms in the pot just now, your belly will soon ache!’

4.2 Optatives

The optative is a variety of the deontic mode, whereby the speaker desires an event of some participant (Chung & Timberlake 1985:247). The Caodeng optative is a formulaic expression consisting of an irrealis-marked clause followed by a possessed form of the word ‘prayer’.⁸

- (9) a. *tʃʰə nɛ-tə-səse? ʋ-nə-ⁿgrəv? (o-smoleɐm)*
 what IMPFV-2-want₃ IRR₁-IRR₂-succeed 3SG:POSS-prayer
 ‘May whatever you wish for come true!’
- b. *ʃsəʃsi tɛmu ʋ-mə-nɐ-wi o-smoleɐm*
 tomorrow rain IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂:DOWN-come 3SG:POSS-prayer
 ‘(I pray that) it will not rain tomorrow.’

4.3 Object complements to deontic matrix verbs

Several types of object-complement clauses, subordinate clauses serving in the O slot of complement-taking verbs, are distinguished in Caodeng. While many complement-

⁸ This is a loanword from Tibetan *smon.lam* ‘prayer’.

taking verbs require infinitival complements in *kə-* (10a-b), syntactic objects of perception verbs take a finite form nominalized by *kə-* (10c):

- (10) a. *ɛji?* *ⁿbri* *kəⁿdi* *spo-aŋ*
 1SG horse INF-ride know.how₃-1SG
 ‘I can ride horses.’
- b. *kəⁿdzétʰi* *sɛje?-jə* *kə*
 INF-dine begin-1PL SFP
 ‘Let’s begin to eat!’
- c. *qʰo?* *zdewe-rv-kə* *cənsen?* *nə-kə-set*
 SEQ villager-PL-ERG Kyensen PFV:DOWN-NMLZ-die₂
ne-fsv-nə-nə? *χfíkə* *nə-nəscer?-nə*
 PFV:TR-hear₂-3PL-SUB very IMPFV:PST-be.shocked₂-3PL
 ‘When the villagers heard that Kyensen died (falling downhill), they were very much shocked.’

However, non-factual matrix verbs denoting *deontic* manipulative meanings, such as desires, intentions, requirements, and preferences (cf. Chung & Timberlake 1985: 249),⁹ must be complemented by irrealis clauses in O function:

- (11) a. *kréfi* *v-mə-jv-fv* *ne-nrewe-aŋ*
 Krashi IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-go IMPFV-hope-1SG
 ‘I hope that Krashi won’t go.’
- b. *ɛji?* *lɛmu-kə* *χtɕəytʰe* *v-tə-poj-nə?* *rgv-aŋ*
 1SG Lamu-ERG butter.tea IRR₁-IRR₂-make₃-SUB like-1SG
 ‘I would like Lamu to make butter tea.’

Non-factive verbs describing alternative worlds in the *epistemic* mode, such as ‘suspect’, ‘believe’, and ‘think (be of the opinion that)’, instead of incorporating complement clauses as their O arguments, are linked either to *apposed*¹⁰ or *coordinated* clauses in

⁹ These verbs instantiating manipulative meanings belong to Dixon’s Secondary-B and Secondary-C sets (Dixon 2006:13).

¹⁰ A syntactic fact supporting the *non-embedding* nature of (12a) is the obligatory absence of the subordinator morpheme *nə?* after the clause ‘Krashi will come’, emphatically not to be confused with the homophonous topic marker *nə?* (interchangeable with *tsə?*):

ɛji? *kréfi* *wi- *nə?* *ne-səse?-aŋ*
 1SG Krashi come IMPFV-think₃-1SG

the realis.¹¹ An apt illustration of the syntactic contrast is provided by the epistemic ‘to think’ (12a-b) versus deontic ‘to desire’ (12c) meanings of the polysemous verb *səsiʔ*:

- (12) a. *ɛjiʔ krɛʃi wi/*ɐ-jɐ-wi ne-səseʔ-aŋ*
 1SG Krashi come IMPFV-think₃-1SG
 ‘I think that Krashi will come.’
- b. *ɛjiʔ ne-səseʔ-aŋ ʃteʔ ʃənəʔ krɛʃi wi*
 1SG IMPFV-think₃-1SG be:EMPH but Krashi come
 ‘I think that Krashi will come (lit. Krashi will come, but this is just what I think.).’
- c. *ɛjiʔ krɛʃi ɐ-jɐ-wi/*wi(-nəʔ) ne-səseʔ-aŋ*
 1SG Krashi IRR₁-IRR₂-come IMPFV-want₃-1SG
 ‘I want Krashi to come.’

4.4 Dubitative futures

In general, situations concerning the future are conveyed in the realis mode by means of non-past stems. Examples of the realis future denoting predictions (13), promises (14), warnings (15), intentions (16), as well as scheduled events, (17) are given below:

- (13) *jomerʔ rgaŋluʔ kə-lɛt-rɐ tɛmpiʔ tʃʰɛt-nə taʔ*
 tonight ball NMLZ:SBJ-play-PL watching present-2/3PL be.certain
 ‘The ball-players will surely present something worth watching tonight!’
- (14) *ɛjiʔ kərujəɐ ʃə-tɐ-səmtsi*
 1SG Tibetan.writing PROS-1>2-teach
 ‘I am going to teach you Tibetan writing.’
- (15) *tʃɔʔdi mə-tʰɐ-tə-ʃɐ ʰdenəʔ tɐ-ntɐr jɐ*
 river.side.of.road NEG:DOWNSTREAM-2-go or 2-fall SFP
 ‘Stay away from the river-side of the road or you will fall over.’
- (16) *təmu tɛ-stet mimi rgaŋluʔ ʃə-lɛt-aŋ*
 rain IMPFV-let.up as.soon.as ball go.and-play-1SG
 ‘As soon as the rain lets up, I will go and play ball.’
- (17) *tətsʰot mŋo-skɛrme ne-tso jɛrmɐ qʰoʔ kʰetʃʰeʔ wi*
 time five-minute IMPFV-elapse about SEQ bus come
 ‘The bus will come in about five minutes.’

¹¹ Apposition and coordination are thus *complementation strategies* (Dixon 2006:33) in rGyalrong, which relate a complement-taking verb to an argument of another verb.

Likewise, interrogatives in Caodeng are generally categorized as realis. The alternative question below illustrates:

- (18) *neji?* *ʃə-tə-revzjaŋ* *so?* *ʃə-tə-rɛmɐ*
 2SG go.and-2-study or go.and-2-do.labor
 ‘Will you go to school, or will you go to work (in the field)?’

One construction has been noted, however, in which irrealis morphology appears in a type of alternative question with future-time reference. This ‘dubitative future’ construction is employed for instance by a hesitant speaker mumbling to her/himself while weighing up the available alternatives for future action:

- (19) a. *v-lɿa?* *v-ʃə-ne-revzjaŋ* *so:?*
 1SG:POSS-child IRR₁-go.and-IRR₂-study or:EMPH¹²
 v-ʃə-nə-rɛmɐ *kə*
 IRR₁-go.and-IRR₂-do.labor SFP
 ‘Will my child go to school, or will s/he go labor in the field?’
 b. *ko?* *tonda?-nə?* *v-ne-netso?-aŋ* *so:?*
 this matter-DET IRR₁-IRR₂-hide-1SG or:EMPH
 v-nə-səmtsi-aŋ *kə*
 IRR₁-IRR₂-tell-1SG SFP
 ‘Will I hide this matter from her/him, or will I tell her/him?’

Whereas the ordinary (formally realis) future (e.g. (13)-(18)) forecasts future situations with full assertive force, the dubitative future exemplified in (19) exists for a diametrically opposed purpose: to indicate by means of irrealis marking the speaker’s indetermination as to which one out of a number of alternative situations should be brought into being.

4.5 Irrealis imperatives

Imperatives and cohortatives (first-person imperatives), which present events for immediate realization or participation by the addressee, are generally evaluated as realis in Caodeng. The sentences below, for instance, request the addressee to leave the speech-act location (20) or enter into a wedded state with the speaker (21) without delay:

¹² In this construction, the connective morpheme *so?* ‘whether...or’ appears in emphatic form, usually with accompanying vowel length.

- (20) *v-vzər* *nə-nv/əfə*
 1SG:POSS-side IMP-go.away
 ‘Get away from me (now)!’
- (21) *rtənmu?* *pe-tsə* *kə*
 marriage do-1DL SFP
 ‘Let’s get married (now)!’

However, two subtypes of imperatives, a ‘postponed imperative’ and a jussive, are found with the irrealis verb form.

4.5.1 Postponed imperatives

In the irrealis-marked ‘postponed imperative’ construction,¹³ the command/request is expected to be realized *during the speaker’s absence at a later time*. The key element here lies in the speaker’s physical inaccessibility as an eyewitness, rather than simply delayed compliance. A particularly enlightening example is (22) below, in which two events are presented for actualization in sequence. Here, the event [go] cannot take place right away, as it is expressly presented as subsequent to the fulfillment of another, temporally prior event [eat supper]. However, the choice is still available for either realis (22a) or irrealis (22b) classification of the imperative verb ‘to go’, the latter implying that the speaker will have left when the hearer gets around to actualizing the event [go]:

- (22) a. *nə-nvpri?* *qʰo?* *noŋme* *jə-fə*
 IMP-eat.supper SEQ only.then IMP-go
 ‘Eat supper and then go (I will still be here)!’
- b. *nə-nvpri?* *qʰo?* *noŋme* *v-jə-tə-fə*
 IMP-eat.supper SEQ only.then IRR₁-IRR₂-2-go
 ‘Eat supper and then go (during my absence)!’

The postponed imperative usage can be further illustrated by (23) below, where only the irrealis version (23b) may be aptly used, for example by a father to warn his son of a potentially scary experience (e.g. watching a horror film) that the child will undergo at a later time by himself:

¹³ Note that postponed imperatives differ from ordinary positive imperatives in requiring the second-person marker *tə-*.

- (23) a. *mə-nə-tə-vər*
 NEG-IMP-2-be.afraid
 ‘Don’t be afraid!’
 b. *v-mə-nə-tə-vər*
 IRR₁-NEG-IRR₂-2-be.afraid
 ‘Don’t be afraid (later, when I am not with you)!’

Some languages exploit the realis/irrealis option for overtly marking expectation in the imperative, in the form of polite (irrealis) versus strong (realis) commands (Mithun 1995:377). The analogous choice available in Caodeng differs in one interesting detail: the irrealis postponed imperative implies weakened certainty in the performance of the desired action because the speaker does not expect her/himself to be around to see it happen.

4.5.2 Jussives

The other irrealis-marked imperative subtype is the jussive, or third-person imperative, which presents propositions for action by a non-locutor,¹⁴ as seen in:

- (24) a. *v-tə-ⁿdzv*
 IRR₁-IRR₂-eat₃
 ‘Let her/him eat it!’
 b. *kréfi melen kʰénan v-jv-nəʃv*
 Krashi surely home IRR₁-IRR₂-go.back
 ‘Make sure Krashi goes back home!’

Crucially, jussives target non-interlocutors instead of the addressee as being responsible for carrying out the requested action; this is evident from the verbal morphology: the non-occurrence of the second person index *tə-*. Unlike in the postponed imperative, there is no requirement for delayed realization of the event, nor can jussives further differentiate between postponed versus immediate execution.¹⁵ The irrealis mode here is justified by the fact that jussives are *indirect* commands conveyed through the non-target hearer serving as an intermediary.

¹⁴ This is the usage recommended in Palmer (1986: §3.3.2).

¹⁵ Consider:

<i>pəʃkʰo</i>	<i>v-tə-ⁿdzv</i>	<i>káde</i>	<i>v-tə-ⁿdzv</i>
now	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat ₃	later	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat ₃
‘Let her/him eat it now!’		‘Let her/him eat it later!’	

Summing up this section, while the Caodeng simple imperatives impose propositions to be carried out immediately and in person by the addressee, the irrealis imperatives do not carry such an expectation, because either delayed realization is desired in the case of postponed imperatives, or someone other than the addressee is the intended agent for actualizing the event in the case of jussives.

5. Speculativity-marking *v-* in a realis context

As shown in §3, Caodeng irrealis morphology involves juxtaposition of two distinct markers, a perfectivizing orientation prefix (IRR₂) preceded by another prefix *v-* (IRR₁). Besides occurring in this particular verbal structure, the latter prefix may once have served a wider function in the language, as evidenced by a continuous-aspect verb form in the neighboring Showu dialect where the prefix *v-* appears in a related *conjecture-marking* function that cannot be subsumed under ordinary irrealis usage.

The continuous is a kind of imperfective aspect. The rGyalrong continuous aspect applies to stative as well as dynamic situations, much as in Quechua (Dahl 1985:94). Caodeng grammar distinguishes a *high-transitivity* and a *low-transitivity* continuous, formed respectively by adding the prefix *vsv-* to a derivative of STEM 1¹⁶ and the prefix *thv-* to STEM 2. The transitivity basis of this distinction is demonstrated in (25), where the transitive (25a) and detransitivized (25b) representations of roughly the same dynamic situation require divergent continuous forms:¹⁷

- (25) a. *tshefsəm* *jəɣe* *vsv-rêt/*thv-ret*
 Tshefsam letter/word CONT:HTR-write
 ‘Tshefsam is writing words.’
 b. *tshefsəm* *thv-reret/*vsv-reret*
 Tshefsam CONT:LTR-do.writing/*CONT:HTR-do.writing
 ‘Tshefsam is writing.’

The disyllabic high-transitivity continuous marker *vsv-* in a language where practically all the grammatical morphemes are monosyllabic calls for further analysis, with a

¹⁶ This stem variant can be regularly derived from the verb base via making certain phonological adjustments to STEM 1, resulting in an accented stem-final syllable in falling tone (J. Sun 2004:292).

¹⁷ The low-transitivity continuous applies not just to dynamic intransitives (e.g. *swim*) but also wherever there is reduced transitivity, such as reflexives, reciprocals, passives, cognition, and perception verbs (e.g. *know*, *see*), as well as all local and inverse scenarios; the high-transitivity continuous occurs elsewhere.

plausible morphemic division into two formatives *v-* and *sv-*. The latter formative seems readily identifiable with an existing verbal prefix *sv-* with a basic *locative* meaning, functioning both as an oblique nominalizer (e.g. *loy* ‘to herd’, *sv-loy?* ‘pasture’; *revzjan* ‘to study’; *sv-revzjan?* ‘school’) and a converb marker (e.g. *xtfi* ‘to be little/young’, *sv-xtfəxtfi?* ‘set ‘to die young’, literally ‘to die at being young’). This would be in perfect accord with the widely attested tendency for progressive/continuous forms to originate from earlier locative structures (Comrie 1976:98-103, Bybee & Dahl 1989: §6, Payne 1997:243). This provisional analysis, if on the right track, yields the familiar prefix *v-*, identical in form to what we find in the irrealis verb form. But how can the continuous, a verbal aspect used primarily for depicting *actual* ongoing situations, have anything to do with non-actuality or speculativity? Is the formal identity here purely accidental?¹⁸

A possible key to this puzzle is supplied by a cognate construction in the Showu rGyalrong dialect. In Showu, unlike in Caodeng, a primary continuous formed by the morpheme *rə/rə-* prefixed to STEM 2 serves all predicates.¹⁹

- (26) a. *əkə* *pəskʰo* *rə-ŋʰgē*
 3SG now CONT-be.ill
 ‘S/he is ill now.’
- b. *rə-mɿ̃-s* *əpu* *tsʰefsəm* *ʒGólo* *rə-χʰɪ̃*
 IMP-look-TR:SG there Tshefsam walnut CONT-buy₂
 ‘Look! Tshefsam is buying walnuts over there.’

Interestingly, an additional *speculative continuous* formation exists in Showu comprising STEM 1 plus *vsv-*, exactly as in the Caodeng high-transitivity continuous introduced above. In this construction, a transitive event that the speaker witnessed a short while

¹⁸ As a matter of fact, a Sidaba rGyalrong sound change turned initial *ŋ-* of certain grammatical morphemes to zero, which would have produced from original **ŋv-* instances of *v-* deceptively isomorphic to the irrealis prefix. A case in point is the first-person singular possessive prefix *v-* ‘my’, from earlier **ŋv-*, cf. *ŋa-* in the Situ rGyalrong dialects.

¹⁹ The alternant *rə-* occurs in the third-person transitive. Thus in Showu (as well as in certain other rGyalrongic languages, cf. J. Sun 2000a: §2.3), the continuous verb formation differentiates transitivity through prefix alternation when the subject is a third person. Incidentally, the general imperfective non-past in Showu can also convey a continuous meaning in the right context, for instance in the presence of the temporal adverb ‘now’:

pəskʰo *təmɿ̃* *nu-tō*
 now rain IMPFV:NONPST-fall
 ‘It is raining now (< *tō* ‘to fall, as of rain’).’

In contrast, the continuous is further grammaticalized in Caodeng where the continuous reading is no longer available for the general imperfective non-past.

ago is assumed to be *still ongoing* at the moment of speaking. The sentence (27),²⁰ in clear contrast with the ordinary continuous in (26b) above, illustrates a typical context calling for the special speculative continuous form:

- (27) *jokmā* *ɛdorʒɛ* *kɛntʃhaχ* *ʒGólo* *ɛsɐ-χtā*
 just.now Dorje street walnut CONT:SPECULATIVE-buy
ti-vájəs *nɐ-xwē* *təzĩr* *nɐ-jâχ* *vā*
 IMP-hurry IMP:DOWN-go maybe 2SG:POSS-hand come
 ‘Dorje was buying walnuts on the street just now; hurry down there and maybe you will still find him.’

The assumption about current state of affairs is the essential semantic component in the speculative continuous. Choosing instead an imperfective past verb with clear past-time reference (28), the speaker imparts a non-committal attitude as to the present whereabouts of Dorje:

- (28) *jokmā* *ɛdorʒɛ* *kɛntʃhaχ* *ʒGólo* *nɐ-χtāĩ*
 just.now Dorje street walnut IMPFV:PST-buy₂
 ‘Dorje was buying walnuts on the street just now (and I am not sure if he is still there).’

Evidently, it is the Showu usage of this marked transitive continuous form that preserves the original function of the complex marker *ɛsɐ-*, where a transparent morphemic analysis into a ‘speculativity’ marker *ɐ-* plus a locative morpheme *sɐ-* is still available. In Caodeng, on the other hand, the function of *ɛsɐ-* has been extended from indicating a specialized transitive scenario to marking prototypical transitive situations in general; the semantic contribution of *ɐ-* has been bleached in the process, and the formerly composite morphemic structure of *ɛsɐ-* has gradually fused into one unanalyzable whole.²¹

²⁰ The Caodeng equivalents to both (26b) and (27), given below as (26b’) and (27’), use the same high-transitivity continuous form:

- (26b’) *tʰɐ-mpʰɛri* *tsʰɛfsəm-kə* *nənəz* *ʒʰGólo* *ɛsɐ-χtu*
 IMP-look Tshəfsam-ERG there walnut CONT:HTR-buy
 (27’) *ʃqʰɛ?* *ɛdórʒɛ-kə* *kɛntʃhaŋ-z* *ʒʰGólo* *ɛsɐ-χtu* *wɛjo*
 just.now Dorje-ERG street-LOC walnut CONT:HTR-buy be.seen
tə-wéjəz *tʰɐ-fɐ* *tʃʰɛlen* *nɛ-ja* *wi*
 IMP-hurry IMP:DOWNSTREAM-go maybe 2SG:POSS-hand come

²¹ Further monosyllabified allomorphs *ɛs-* and *ɐ-* occur respectively before polysyllabic stems (e.g. *ɛs-mərku* ‘be stealing’) and before stems beginning with the syllable *sɐ-* (e.g. *ɐ-sɛkʰu* ‘be fumigating’).

6. Conclusions

The foregoing survey launched out on a particular Caodeng rGyalrong verb form [IRR₁ + IRR₂ + STEM 1/3] occurring in a number of construction types that fall within the cross-linguistically typical irrealis range, including predictive and imaginative conditionals, optatives, complement clauses of deontic matrix predicates, dubitative futures, postponed imperatives, and jussives. Its application to unreality conditionals, the quintessence of irrealis construction types (Mithun 1995:384, 1999:179), should warrant this verb form as a veritable irrealis formation. Further investigation into its additional uses unveils interesting ways the conceptual space of non-actuality is delimited in Caodeng. The fact that irrealis morphology is accessible to optatives and deontic object complement clauses but not to epistemic complements represents a language-specific partiality for explicitly marking *weaker manipulative force*, the deontic dimension of irrealis modality (Givón 1994). Rather than giving an indiscriminate treatment to futures and imperatives, furthermore, Caodeng grammar exploits the realis-irrealis dichotomy to a high degree, signaling differences in *actualizing potentials* between ordinary imperatives and future predictions (realis) on the one hand, and postponed imperatives, jussives, and dubitative futures (irrealis) on the other.

The prefix *v-* (IRR₂), which co-occurs with the perfectivity-indicating orientation prefix (IRR₁) to mark the irrealis verb form, may once have served a more general grammatical function. Rather plausible evidence of this comes from the related Showu dialect, where the *speculative continuous* complex marker still lends itself to analysis into a ‘speculativity’ marker *v-* and a locative prefix *sv-*. The common semantic thread running through the irrealis and the speculative continuous formations appears to be *attenuated assertion* on the part of the speaker regarding the actuality of the predicated situation. This could very well have been the original, unified function of the prefix *v-*.

The preceding sections have hopefully made a good case for a full-fledged system of irrealis marking in the Sidaba dialect of rGyalrong (represented by the Caodeng and Showu subdialects). A preliminary comparison uncovers parallel core irrealis usages expressed by comparable morphological material in Situ and Chabao, the other two major dialects of rGyalrong. In the following, examples of conditionals (29), deontic object-complement clauses (30), dubitative futures (31), postponed imperatives (32), and jussives (33) are given in the Zhuokeji and Dazang varieties, representing respectively the Situ and Chabao dialects of rGyalrong:²²

²² Zhuokeji and Dazang are varieties of the Situ and Chabao dialects of rGyalrong, respectively. Zhuokeji is also the target variety in Lin Xiangrong’s trail-blazing rGyalrong grammar which, instead of properly recognizing the irrealis structure as a distinct gram-type, merely exemplifies its jussive use (XR Lin 1993:244-245). The Zhuokeji and Dazang comparative data cited are

(29) Zhuokeji

<i>nə-kə-zôr</i>	<i>a-to-mnê</i>	<i>ti</i>
2SG:POSS-NMLZ-hurt	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -heal	SUB
<i>ŋə-tfĩm-s</i>	<i>a-to-tó-po-n</i>	
1SG:POSS-house-LOC	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -2-come-2SG	

Dazang

<i>na-kə-mɣem</i>	<i>a-tv-mna</i>	<i>tfv</i>
2SG:POSS-NMLZ-hurt	IRR-PFV-heal	SUB
<i>a-k^{ha}</i>	<i>a-jə-tə-γi</i>	
1SG:POSS-house	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -2-come	

‘If your wound has healed, come over to my house!’

(30) Zhuokeji

<i>nə-kə-zôr</i>	<i>kətfê</i>	<i>a-to-mnê</i>	<i>wə-smolê</i>
2SG:POSS-NMLZ-hurt	completely	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -heal	3SG:POSS-prayer

Dazang

<i>na-kə-mɣem</i>	<i>kəpɔ</i>	<i>a-tv-mna</i>	<i>smələm</i>
2SG:POSS-NMLZ-hurt	completely	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -heal	prayer

‘May (lit. I desire that) your wound heal completely!’

(31) Zhuokeji

<i>pakfā</i>	<i>a-tó-zv-w</i>	<i>mə</i>	<i>kərgufā</i>	<i>a-tó-zv-w</i>
pork	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat-3SG:OBJ	Q	beef	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat-3SG:OBJ

Dazang

<i>paxfa</i>	<i>a-tvⁿdze</i>	<i>fi</i>	<i>skvmfa</i>	<i>a-tvⁿdze</i>
pork	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat	or	beef	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -eat

‘Should s/he eat pork, or should s/he eat beef (i.e. Should I serve him pork or beef)?’

(32) Zhuokeji

<i>tɛjmōk</i>	<i>na-tó-ra-w</i>	<i>wəŋk^{hūj}</i>	<i>a-to-tó-skər</i>
mushroom	PFV-2-find ₂ -3SG:OBJ	after	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -2-measure

Dazang

<i>tɛjmok</i>	<i>pə-tə-mto-s</i>	<i>əq^{hu}</i>	<i>tfv</i>	<i>a-tv-tə-skər</i>
mushroom	PFV-2-find-TR	after	SUB	IRR ₁ -IRR ₂ -2-measure

‘After you find the mushrooms, weigh them!’

courtesy of You-Jing Lin. Whether Zhuokeji and Dazang employ irrealis syntactic structures comparable to the Sidaba speculative realis constructions remains to be ascertained.

- (33) Zhuokeji
 wəjō=kə *fē* *ɛ-nɛ-phêk*
 3SG=ERG wood IRR₁-IRR₂-chop
 Dazang
 mi=ɣə *si* *a-pə-phax*
 3SG=ERG wood IRR₁-IRR₂-chop
 ‘Let him/her chop wood!’

All the Zhuokeji and Dazang irrealis-marked clauses above exhibit the verb form [IRR₁ + IRR₂ + STEM 1/3], perfectly cognate with the Caodeng and Showu irrealis formation. Given these close formal and functional parallelisms between the three divergent rGyalrong dialects, it is safe to postulate irrealis as a pan-dialectal inflectional category of the rGyalrong verb, with deep roots in the history of the language.

The lack of ‘widespread cross-linguistic evidence that such a semantic space has a single grammatical marker’ is one of the reasons that discourage some scholars from acknowledging irrealis as a valid universal gram-type (Bybee 1998:264). In this connection, it is sobering to reflect on the case of rGyalrong where, despite its relatively long research history by Tibeto-Burman standards, the existence of salient and uniform grammatical marking correlated with typical irrealis semantics remained hitherto totally unrecognized (e.g. XR Lin 1993). Prospects, therefore, seem good for more such languages to come to light as attention is directed to the relevant typological phenomena, and as more linguists dedicate themselves to documenting in depth even less well understood languages.

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嘉戎語動詞的非實然範疇

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藏緬語族嘉戎語（四川西北）中，「實然性」為一形態完整並有統一標記之動詞曲折範疇。本文根據嘉戎語草登方言及其他主要方言之新材料，論證「實然狀況」為確實存在之跨語言語法類型 (gram-type)。嘉戎語有獨特之非實然動詞形式，由非過去詞幹添加特殊 *ɐ*- 前綴 (IRR₁) 及功用為標記完整體之方向前綴 (IRR₂) 構成。除用於較典型之非實然語境外，非實然式還可區別一般之命令式、未來式（實然）及實現潛能較弱之延遲命令式、希冀式、遲疑式等（非實然）。本文兼論修梧方言中所發現一種實然構造中 *ɐ*- 前綴之用法，並推測此前綴過去曾有「緩和陳述斷言度」之廣泛語法功用。嘉戎語內部分歧顯著，而各主要方言非實然式用法共性極多，說明非實然式為本語植根深遠之超方言形態句法特徵。

關鍵詞：藏緬語，嘉戎語，動詞形態，非實然式，實然狀況