

Tense and mood: semantics of the Djambarrpuyŋu verbal paradigm

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Abstract

In Djambarrpuyŋu — a Yolŋu language spoken in northern Australia — verbs stems are inflected for one of four different inflectional categories. Previous descriptions of these categories’ functional domains have eschewed a unified analysis of their semantics. The reason for this is the apparent polyfunctionality of each inflection, in large part driven by a number of striking phenomena, notably: (1) **CYCLIC TENSE** (the temporal interval/s that are compatible with each inflection are ostensibly discontinuous) and (2) **ASYMMETRIC NEGATION** (where a mood/reality status distinction available in positive clauses is unavailable in negative ones.)

In this talk, I provide a branching-times-theoretic analysis of of Djambarrpuyŋu’s inflectional categories as tense/mood markers by appealing to two privative semantic features: a temporal one (PRECONTEMPORANEITY) and a modal one (NONVERIDICALITY).

(1) Temporal reference and verbal inflection in Djambarrpuyŋu [djɾ]

- a. *ŋarra ga nhä-ma mukulnha (dhiyaŋ bala)* [PRESENT]
1S IPFV.I see-I aunt-ACC now
'I see/am looking my aunt (right now).'
- b. *ŋarra nhä-ŋal mukulnha gäthur* [SAME DAY PAST]
1S see-III aunt-ACC today
'I saw my aunt this morning.'
- c. *ŋarra nhä-ma mukulnha barpuru* [PRE-TODAY PAST]
1S see-I aunt-ACC yesterday
'I saw my aunt yesterday.'

(2) Negation interacting with inflection category in Djambarrpuyŋu [djɾ]

- a. *bäyŋu ŋarra gi nhä-ŋu mukulnha dhiyaŋ bala* [PRESENT]
NEG 1S IPFV.II see.II aunt.ACC now
'I don't see my aunt (right now).'
- b. *bäyŋu ŋarra nhä-nha mukulnha gäthur* [SAME-DAY PAST]
NEG 1S see-IV aunt.ACC today
'I didn't see my aunt this morning.'
- c. *bäyŋu ŋarra nhä-ŋu mukulnha barpuru* [PRE-TODAY PAST]
NEG 1S see-II aunt.ACC yesterday
'I didn't see my aunt yesterday.'