

Empirical methods for describing tense, aspect, and mood: the case study of Nafsan

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4 March 2021, ICLDC, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa



Introduction

- describing tense, aspect, and mood (TAM) categories in language documentation is difficult
- I will discuss available empirical methods for studying TAM categories:
 - corpus work
 - storyboards
 - translation-based questionnaires (accompanied by meta-linguistic discussions)
- storyboards and questionnaires can help us find TAM functions missing from the corpus and uncover language-specific TAM properties
- I will use the testing of the Nafsan Perfect as an example of how these methods can be used

Nafsan (South Efate): Previous work

- grammatical description by Thieberger (2006) and other published work
- corpus (Thieberger, 1995–2019)

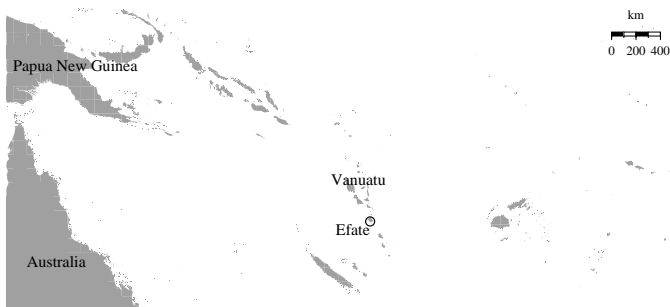


Figure 1: Location of Vanuatu and the island of Efate

Nafsan: Fieldwork

- storyboards (von Prince, 2018c; Krajinović, 2018c)
- questionnaires (Dahl, 2000; Olsson, 2013; Veselinova, 2018) and elicitation
- archived in PARADISEC (Krajinović, 2017)



Figure 2: Efate with locations where Nafsan is spoken

Perfect aspect (Comrie, 1976)

- (1)
 - a. resultative (*I have arrived.*)
 - b. 'hot news' (*I have just arrived.*)
 - c. experiential (*I have been to Paris.*)
 - d. universal (*I have been living in Paris since 2005.*)
 - e. anteriority readings: past/future perfect (*When you entered the room, I had already left.*)
 - f. incompatibility with definite temporal adverbs in present perfect (**I have arrived yesterday.*)

Perfect aspect (Comrie, 1976)

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'Already' and iamitives

'Already', in contrast to the perfect, can be identified through (Vander Klok & Matthewson, 2015):

- change-of-state meaning
- **co-occurrence with past temporal adverbs**

Olsson (2013) argues for iamitives as a separate category from perfect:

- **lack of experiential, universal, and anteriority functions**
- presence of an additional change-of-state meaning (Olsson, 2013)

Structure of Nafsan

Table 1: Exemplified verbal complex in Nafsan

| SBJ= | TMA | AUX | NEG1 | BEN | V | PFV | NEG2 |
|-------------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|-----------------|---|-----------|------------|
| <i>rui</i> = (3PL.PRF), | <i>pe</i> (PRF) | <i>mer</i> ('again') | <i>ta</i> (<i>p</i>) | <i>ga</i> (3SG) | | <i>su</i> | <i>mau</i> |
| <i>i</i> = (3SG), | ⋮ | ⋮ | | | | | |
| <i>ka</i> = (1SG.IRR) | ⋮ | ⋮ | | | | | |

Corpus work

The marker *pe* has been described as perfect in Nafsan (Thieberger, 2006), but some challenges remain:

- co-occurrence with temporal adverbs, like ‘already’

(3) My brother SAY (yesterday) that the water BE COLD (the day before yesterday, but I think he was wrong) (Dahl, 1985:TMAQ113)

ḡal-u-k *i=tl-i-ø* *nanom* *na* *nai*
 brother-V-1SG.DP 3SG=say-TS-3SG.OBJ yesterday COMP water

ki=pe ***mlanr nas***
 3SG.PRF=PRF cold day.before.yesterday

‘My brother said yesterday that the water was cold the day before yesterday.’ (Thieberger, 2006)

Corpus work

Table 2: Occurrence of different functions of *pe* in the corpus (+ attested, ? unattested/unclear, perfect=blue, iamitive/‘already’=red)

| Method | Universal | Experiential | Anterior. | Result. | Adverb | CoS |
|--------|-----------|--------------|-----------|---------|--------|-----|
| Corpus | ? | ? | + | + | + | + |

Questionnaires: Targeting perfect readings

- **The Perfect Questionnaire** (Dahl, 2000:PQ) targets perfect functions (cf. general TAM questionnaire Dahl, 1985)

(4) [Experiential] Question: You MEET my sister (at any time in your life up to now)? (Dahl, 2000:801, PQ4)

(5) [Nafsan]

kui=pe paatlas kore-k te-mal?

2SG.PRF meet sister-1SG.POSS one-time

‘Have you met my sister?’ (AK1-115-01)

- only possible with speakers fluent in English and interested in meta-linguistic discussions (1–2 speakers in Nafsan)

Storyboards

- 1 the linguist tells the story (in Bislama here) and the speaker retells it by looking at the pictures (Burton & Matthewson, 2015)
- 2 less translation bias; speakers do not need to be fluent in English; allows for more speakers being tested (5–6 speakers in Nafsan)

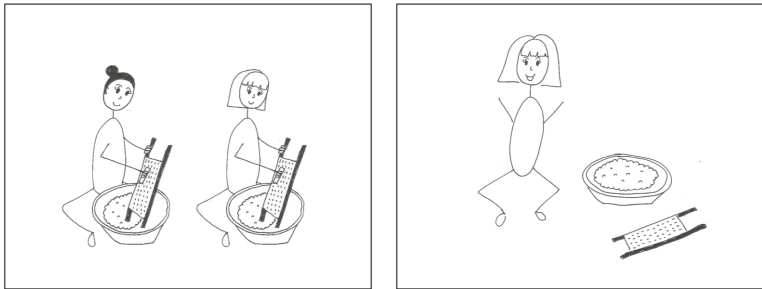


Figure 3: ‘While Lili is grating pink taro, Mary is grating white taro.’ Targeted context: ‘Mary says: I have **grated** the taro, what do we do now?’ [from “Making laplap” (Krajinović, 2018c)]

Missing functions: Testing experiential perfect

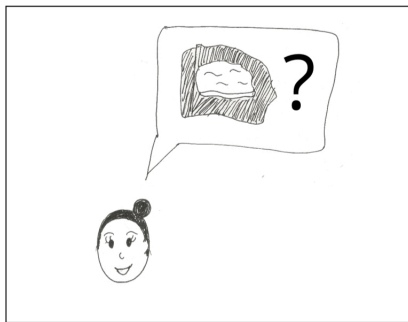


Figure 4: [EXPERIENTIAL] 4. Lili asks Mary: **Have you ever eaten laplap before?**
[from “Making laplap” (Krajinović, 2018c)]

Missing functions: Experiential perfect in Nafsan

- (6) Ag *kui=pe* *paam kapu?*
 2SG 2SG.PRF=PRF eat laplap
 ‘Have you eaten laplap before?’ (AK1-151-02, 00:01:18.633-00:01:20.950)

Missing functions: Testing universal perfect

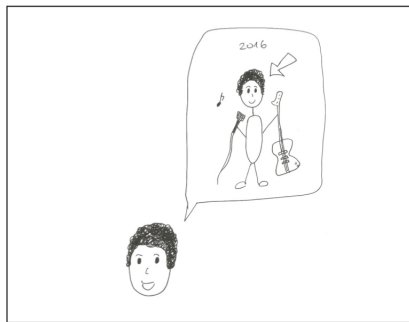


Figure 5: [UNIVERSAL] 6. But my hair **has been long** like this since I started singing in a band (2016). [from “Haircuts” (Krajinović, 2018b)]

Missing functions: Universal perfect in Nafsan

- (7) *nal-u-k ga ki=pe pei top malpei mai malen kin*
 hair-V-1SG.DP that 3SG.PRF=PRF first big before come when COMP
a=to lag eñrom ni band i=skei
 1SG=PROG sing inside of band 3SG=one
 ‘My hair **has been long since** I started singing in a band.’ (AK1-152-03,
 00:03:00.705-00:03:14.338, based on Koontz-Garboden 2007:142)

Temporal adverbs: questionnaire

- (8) Context: A question asked at 9 o'clock a.m.: Why do you look so tired? Answer: I WAKE UP at 4 o'clock this morning. (Dahl, 2000:TMAQ 16)

**kai=pe/ a=pilo 4 oklok ðulðog.*

*1SG.PRF=PRF 1SG=wake.up 4 o'clock morning

'I woke up at 4 o'clock this morning.' (AK1-119-01)

- (9) Context: If your alarm is set for 5 a.m., but by chance you woke up at 4 a.m.

Kai=pe pilo 4 oklok ðulðog.

1SG.PRF=PRF wake.up 4 o'clock morning

'I had woken up at 4 o'clock in the morning.' (AK1-119-01)

- this type of insight is only possible through a meta-linguistic discussion

Temporal adverbs: Storyboards

Matthewson et al. (2017) highlight this example as eliciting temporal adverb restrictions:

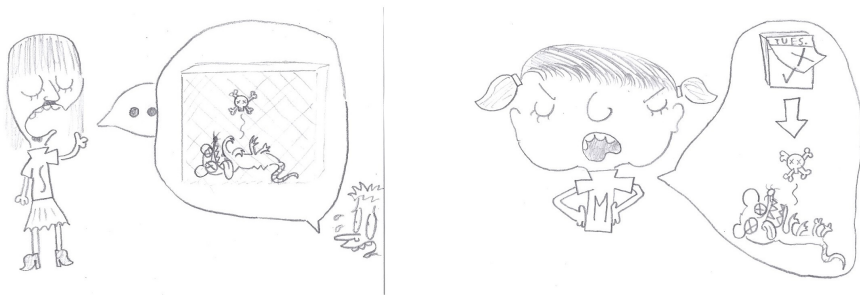


Figure 6: A: The pet rat has just died! B: He is lying, he died yesterday. [from “Miss Smith’s bad day” (Matthewson, 2014)]

Temporal adverbs: Storyboards

- (10) Context: The rat the class takes care of **has just died**.

i=to psir, ga ki=pe mat nanom su.

3SG=PROG lie 3SG 3SG.PRF=PRF die yesterday PFV

'He is lying, **he had died yesterday**.' (AK1-146-04,

00:04:03.626-00:04:10.640)

Summary

Table 3: Occurrence of different functions of *pe* in 3 empirical methods (+ attested, ? unattested/unclear, -/+ restricted to certain environments, **perfect=blue**)

| Method | Universal | Experiential | Anterior. | Result. | Adverb | CoS |
|---------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|----------------|---------------|-----|
| Corpus | ? | ? | + | + | + | + |
| Storyb. | + | + | + | + | -/+ | -/+ |
| Quest. | + | + | + | + | -/+ | -/+ |

Conclusion

- 1 preliminary work on the corpus is useful in order to establish the hypotheses and design the methodology
- 2 translation-based questionnaires can quickly identify new functions and language-specific restrictions
 - meta-linguistic discussions can be especially helpful for this
- 3 storyboard test the findings easily across different speakers (not fluent in English), with less translation bias
- 4 restrictions based on the English structures might be realized in a different way, e.g. because of lack of tense
- 5 we need to pay attention to possible ambiguities in experiments

Questionnaires elicited in Nafsan (Krajinović, 2019)

Table 4: Questionnaires elicited in Nafsan

| Name of the questionnaire | Targeted categories | Source/reference |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| The Perfect Questionnaire | perfect | Dahl (2000:PQ) |
| The Iamitive Questionnaire | iamitive | Olsson (2013:IQ) |
| The <i>Nondum</i> Questionnaire | <i>nondum</i> ‘not yet’ | Veselinova (2018:NQ) |
| The Future Questionnaire | future, irrealis | Dahl (2000:FQ) |

Storyboards elicited in Nafsan (Krajinović, 2019) I

| Storyboard | Targeted categories |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| “Festival” (von Prince, 2018c) | modality (conditionals) |
| “Red yam” (von Prince, 2018d) | modality (conditionals) |
| “Fat pig” (von Prince, 2018b) | modality (relative clauses) |
| “Bundle of bananas” (von Prince, 2018a) | modality (complement clauses) |
| “Tomato and pumpkin” (von Prince, 2018e) | aspect (change of state) |
| “The fortune teller” (TFS, 2010) | modality (conditionals) |
| “The woodchopper” (TFS, 2011d) | modality (conditionals) |
| “Tom and Mittens” (Rolka & Cable, 2014) | modality (epistemic) |
| “Bill vs. the weather” (Vander Klok, 2013) | modality (epistemic) |
| “Chore girl” (TFS, 2011a) | modality (deontic) |
| “Hawaii trip” (Underhill & Cable, 2015) | aspect (sequences, temp. adverbs) |
| “Chameleon story” (TFS, 2012a) | aspect (change of state) |
| “Sick girl” (TFS, 2011c) | modality (deontic) |
| “Feeding fluffy” (TFS, 2012b) | modality (epistemic) |

Storyboards elicited in Nafsan (Krajinović, 2019) II

| | |
|---|---|
| “Miss Smith’s bad day” (Matthewson, 2014) | aspect (perfect) |
| “On the lam” (TFS, 2011b) | modality (epistemic) |
| “Garden” (Krajinović, 2018a) | modality (conditionals) |
| “Garden 2” (Krajinović, 2018a) | modality (conditionals) |
| “Making laplap” (Krajinović, 2018c) | aspect (perfect), modality/negation |
| “Making laplap 2” (Krajinović, 2018c) | modality/negation |
| “Haircuts” (Krajinović, 2018b) | aspect (perfect, change of state, neg.) |

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