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# Polyfunctionality vs. compositionality and the tense/aspect – modality divide: descriptive, comparative/typological and theoretical issues

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## Résumé

There is a well-established series of works treating so called ‘tense-aspect’ (T/A) markers as having the ability to yield modal meanings (Damourette & Pinchon 1911; Vet 1983; Iatridou 2000; Cipria & Roberts 2000; Saussure & Sthioul 2005; Brisard 2010; Altshuler 2014), thus ‘blurring the lines’ between modal and T/A meanings, by allowing markers single markers to have ‘hybrid/mixed’ (and non-composite) TA and modal meanings. See also (Van Linden & Verstraete 2008; Halpert & Bjorkman 2013), where the prevalent cross-linguistic morphological complexity in counterfactual utterances is treated as “illusory”. Challenging such views on the basis of a sample of morphologically rich languages, comprising Australian and Indo-European languages (notably English, French, German and Russian), we will argue that at least some counterfactual modal meanings are structurally complex and should be construed from morpho-semantically separate T/A and modal ingredients. For instance, in Anindhilyakwa (1), the irrealis inflection semantically outscopes the TA inflection, as the latter bears directly on the meaning of the ‘be in pain’ root (causing a coerced inchoative reading). In contrast, in Murrinh-Patha (2), the irrealis inflection must scope between the root and the past imperfective inflection, as the latter rejects telic verbs on its own (Nordlinger & Caudal 2012), i.e. *IRR* behaves like a modal auxiliary in (2), and the TA meaning bears on *IRR*. Other related cross-linguistic facts will be here construed into a typology of morpho-syntactic and semantic structures for counterfactuals, at least some of which require autonomous TA and modal ingredients.

(1) *Kamvdhakama nvngkakina makina makarda*

*IRR.veg/2sg-burn/cook.NP1-ma 2sg-that veg-that veg.sea*

*akwa kvmvrdamardhv-ma nvngk-ennvng-arnvk-awura*

and *IRR.2sg-all.over-be.in.pain.NP1-ma 2sg-m.alp-times-alone*

‘When [the bristleworm] stings you, you will start being in pain.’ (Anindhilyakwa) (van Egmond 2012:216)

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(2) *ku bag mertthaka* (Murrinh-Patha) (Nordlinger & Caudal 2012)

NC :ani bag 1sgS.SNATCH(9).PastIrrealis-get-PastImperf-FOC  
'I should have brought my bag.'

**Mots-Clés:** modality counterfactuals tense aspect typology