

## The semantics and pragmatics of past tense marking in Fox

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In this paper I examine the functions of an inflectional suffix on verbs *-ehe* ~ *-oha*.<sup>1</sup> This suffix appears on a subset of the modes of the conjunct order; I argue in this paper that its basic or original function is to mark past tense and that it has been extended to indicate various types of irrealis functions as well, such as indicating speaker uncertainty, unfulfilled intentions, counterfactual conditions and wishes, and surprise. I will give examples of each of these functions below and discuss the semantic and pragmatic motivations which link past tense with the irrealis functions.

A crosslinguistic connection between past tense and irrealis has been pointed out by Steele 1975, James 1982, and Fleischman 1989, among others. Within Algonquian, the past tense affixes in Cree-Montagnais-Naskapi have developed irrealis functions as well (James 1991, Clarke and James 1994). In the final section of today's paper I will briefly compare Fox with Cree and Montagnais.

Let's begin by considering how the verbs marked with *-ehe* fit into the overall system of verb inflection. Fox has twenty-six paradigms or MODES of verb inflection, which may be grouped together into ORDERS based upon morphological similarities.

Since I will be discussing past tense marking in this paper, it is important to point out here that the majority of modes in Fox receive an interpretation of nonfuture tense. That is, a verb may be understood as referring to either past time or present time, depending upon the context (e.g. presence of specific adverbials). Example (1) shows that a verb in the independent indicative may be glossed with either present or past tense in English. If one wishes to express future tense, the proclitic (*w*)*i-h*= is attached to the verb, as in (2).

- (1) wača·ho-wa            'She is cooking; she cooked.'  
    cook-3/ind.ind
- (2) wi·h=wača·ho-wa    'She will cook.'  
    fut=cook-3/ind.ind

The verbs bearing the suffix *-ehe* all belong to the conjunct order. In Table 1 I've given schematic representations of each mode of the conjunct order.

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<sup>1</sup> The allomorph *-oha* appears after *-(y)akw* '21' and *-(y)ekw* '2p', giving *-(y)akoha* and *-(y)ekoha*. Neither allomorph may be used after the TA suffix *-enako-we* '1-2p'; this suffix cannot be followed by any other material.

**Table 1. Conjunct modes**

Stem in examples is *wača·ho-* ‘cook’, P/N suffix is *-t*, animate 3rd sg.; IC = initial change

Subjunctive Stem + P/N + <i>e</i> <i>wača·ho-t-e</i> ‘if/when she cooks’	Unreal Stem + P/N + <i>ehe</i> <i>wača·ho-t-ehe</i> ‘if she had cooked’
Negative [with <i>a·kwi</i> ‘not’] Stem + P/N + <i>ini</i> <i>a·kwi wača·ho-č-ini</i> ‘she doesn’t/didn’t cook’	Past Negative [with <i>a·kwi</i> ‘not’] Stem + P/N + <i>ehe</i> <i>a·kwi wača·ho-t-ehe</i> ‘she didn’t cook’ [remote past]
Aorist Conjunct <i>e·h=</i> + Stem + P/N + <i>i</i> <i>e·h=wača·ho-č-i</i> ‘that she cooks/cooked’	Past Aorist Conjunct <i>e·h=</i> + Stem + P/N + <i>ehe</i> <i>e·h=wača·ho-t-ehe</i> ‘that she hadcooked’
Conjunct Participle IC + Stem + P/N + Head.of.RC <i>we·ča·ho-t-a</i> ‘the one who cooks/cooked’	Past Conjunct Participle IC + Stem + P/N + <i>ehe</i> <i>we·ča·ho-t-ehe</i> ‘the one who had cooked’
Changed Conjunct IC + Stem + P/N + <i>i</i> <i>we·ča·ho-č-i</i> ‘when she cooked’	Changed Unreal [with <i>keye·hapa</i> ‘in fact’] IC + Stem + P/N + <i>ehe</i> <i>keye·hapa we·ča·ho-t-ehe</i> ‘it turns out she cooked!’
Iterative IC + Stem + P/N + <i>ini</i> <i>we·ča·ho-č-ini</i> ‘whenever she cooks’	
Injunctive Stem + P/N + <i>ye</i> <i>wača·ho-č-e</i> ‘let her cook!’	
Plain Conjunct [rare; with <i>a·mihtahi</i> ‘would’] Stem + P/N + <i>i</i> <i>a·mihtahi wača·ho-č-i</i> ‘she would cook’	

You can see that many of the modes form pairs, where the mode listed to the right is formed identically to the one on the left, except that the final suffix is *-ehe*. The first pair has the subjunctive on the left, and the unreal mode on the right. The mode suffix for the subjunctive is a short *-e*, that for the unreal is *-ehe*. The second pair has the negative on the left and the past negative on the right; in the past negative the suffix *-ehe* replaces the mode suffix of the negative, *-ini*. Likewise, the aorist conjunct and the past aorist conjunct form a pair, with *-ehe* showing up in the past aorist. The conjunct participle – used in relative clauses – has as its final suffix a suffix agreeing with the head of the relative clause. In the past conjunct participle, however, the head suffix is replaced by *-ehe*. Finally, the changed conjunct and the changed unreal are formally similar, though functionally dissimilar. Again, the suffix *-ehe* is found in the changed unreal.

As already mentioned, most verbs which are unmarked for tense may receive either a past tense or a present tense interpretation. This can be seen in Table 1 in the glosses for the examples of negative, aorist conjunct, and conjunct participle. In the contexts in which the suffix *-ehe* marks past tense, then, it marks something more than just ordinary past tense: either a remote past or a relative past tense.

### Relative past tense

I'll begin by describing the contexts in which *-ehe* marks a relative past tense.

- (3) ayo·h=meko ki·hpya·ya·ni e·h=kehke·netama·ni  
 here=emph perf.come 1/ch.conj aor=know 1-0/aor
- e·h=kemo·temiwa·tehe aša·haki neči·ma·ni  
 aor=steal.O2.from 3p-1/past.aor Sioux.pl my.canoe

‘After I came here I realized  
 that the Sioux had stolen my canoe’

(3) contains a subordinate clause verb inflected in the past aorist. Here the suffix *-ehe* indicates that the time of the Sioux stealing the canoe was prior to the speaker's arrival.

(3) contains several grammatical devices which indicate tense or sequence of actions. The changed conjunct verb establishes a reference time R which is prior to the time of speaking S. The perfective preverb which appears on the changed conjunct verb indicates that the action of the main clause (‘know; realize’) is later than the reference time R. Finally, the past aorist conjunct inflection on ‘steal’ indicates that the action of the subordinate clause is prior to the reference time R.

The use of the suffix *-ehe* on relative clauses functions in much the same way: it indicates that the action of the lower clause is past relative to some reference point in the past, as in example (4):

- (4) nemi·nawe·neta e·šimikehe  
 think.seriously.about 1-0/ind.ind tell.thus X-1/past.part/oblique.head  
 ‘I thought seriously about what I had been told [earlier]’

### Remote past tense; speaker uncertainty

Now let's consider the function of the suffix *-ehe* used in main clauses. Here it cannot be a relative past tense, because no reference time has yet been established. Instead, *-ehe* in main clauses indicates a remote past. An example is given in (5), where the verb is inflected in the past negative:

- (5) a·kwi=ča·h=ye·toke nana·ši mešotehe  
not=so=it.seems ever hit.with.shot X-3/past.neg  
i·niya nemešo·ha  
that.absent my.grandfather  
'My late grandfather was never hit in battle, it seems.'

There is, however, no fixed boundary separating regular past time from remote past time: the decision to treat a given situation as remote past is a subjective one of the speaker's. For nonfirst person subjects, the remote past forms carry an evidential flavor: the speaker cannot vouch directly for the truth of the statement, because it happened long ago. In other words, here we find the suffix *-ehe* functioning both as past tense and with an irrealis function.

I checked (5) – which is taken from a text – with my consultant and asked her to compare it to the same sentence with ordinary negative inflection.

- (6) a·kwi=ča·h=ye·toke nana·ši mešočini  
not=so=it.seems ever hit.with.shot X-3/neg  
i·niya nemešo·ha  
that.absent my.grandfather  
'My late grandfather was never hit in battle, it seems.'

She said they both meant the same thing, but that with ordinary negative inflection it was more of a direct statement, while in (5) the speaker didn't know for sure; it wasn't a direct statement.

The same pattern is found when the past aorist is used in a main clause, as in (7):

- (7) nekoti neniwa okwisani e·h=ma·mahkate·wi·na·tehe  
one man his.son.obv aor=redup.make.fast 3-3'/past.aor  
'A certain man made his son fast' [long ago; don't know for sure]

The past aorist in (7) indicates a remote past; since the arguments of the verb are third person it implies the speaker is uncertain about the validity of the assertion.

### Future + past: unfulfilled intention

Another context in which the suffix *-ehe* can be seen to have an irrealis function is in constructions like (8):

- (8) me·no·hkami·niki      wi·h=ahčike·tehe  
 be.spring 0'/ch.conj    fut=plant 3/past.aor  
 'In the spring he was going to plant.'

In (8) the verb bears the future proclitic *wi·h=* and is inflected in the past aorist. This combination of future plus past indicates unfulfilled intentions. The past tense suffix indexes a point in the past at which the subject had intended to do something. In other words, at some time in the past, the subject thought, "I will plant," but he failed to do so.

The fact that the subject failed to carry out his intention can be considered an implicature of this construction. If the subject *had* fulfilled his intention, we would report that 'he planted'. Instead, the most that we can say is that he intended to do it.

### Counterfactual conditions and wishes

The suffix *-ehe* is also found in the unreal mode, which is used in the if-clause of conditionals and in wishes. In these two environments the unreal mode contrasts with the subjunctive mode, as shown below.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>(9)    pya·t-e<br/>               come-3-subjunctive<br/>               'If he comes .../When he comes ...'</p> | <p>(10)    pya·t-ehe<br/>                come-3-unreal<br/>                'If he had come ...'</p> |
|--|---|

(9) and (10) are examples of conditional clauses; in (9) notice that the subjunctive inflection may be used either for hypothetical situations (glossed with 'if') or for situations which the speaker assumes will occur in the future (glossed with 'when').

The contrast between subjunctive and unreal in wishes is exemplified in (11) and (12):

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>(11)    ta·ni='nahi    pya·t-e<br/>                how=emph    come-3-subjunctive<br/>                'I wish he would come!'</p> | <p>(12)    ta·ni='nahi    pya·t-ehe<br/>                how=emph    come-3-unreal<br/>                'I wish he would have come!'</p> |
|--|--|

Wishes in Fox are expressed by an idiomatic combination of particles, *ta·ni='nahi*, followed by a verb in the subjunctive, if the speaker believes it is possible for the wish to come true, or by a verb in the unreal mode, if the speaker views the wish as impossible.

The above examples show that both the subjunctive and the unreal modes are used for hypothetical situations. The contrast between them seems to be what Fillmore 1990a,b calls EPISTEMIC STANCE: the unreal mode is used for a negative epistemic stance (where the speaker believes that the situation did not or will not occur) and the subjunctive is used either for a neutral or a positive epistemic stance, regarding future events.

It seems clear, therefore, that the function of the suffix *-ehe* in the unreal mode can be grouped together with the other irrealis functions that we have seen above. However, all the previous cases of *-ehe* also involved past tense in some way, so the question arises whether the unreal suffix is also marking past tense. What we can say is that the best or clearest examples of counterfactual conditions are set in the past. That is,

if the time of the conditional clause is past tense, then the speaker knows for sure that the condition was not fulfilled, and any consequence of that condition is a hypothetical one. The same reasoning may be applied to wishes: if the time of the wished-for event was in the past, the speaker knows that the event did not occur and therefore his wish that it had occurred is an impossible one.

The following examples, however, show that the unreal mode is not restricted to past tense. A verb inflected in the unreal may refer to present tense or to future tense, as long as the condition is contrary to fact:

- (13) pwa·wi=mata -ona·pe·miya·nehe                      wi·tamo·naka·wa·ha  
not=rather    -have.husband 1/unreal                      tell 1-2p/potential  
'If I weren't married I would tell you [pl.]' (W187C)
- (14) wa·panike                      ni·miwa·tehe                      mawi·wa·pamiye·ka·kehe  
be.dawn 0/subj                      dance 3p/unreal                      go-look.at 1p-3(p)/potential  
'If they would dance tomorrow we would go see them'

In other words, the suffix *-ehe* in the unreal mode may have originally marked only a past tense, but it has now been extended to mark contrary to fact situations regardless of tense.

### Surprise

The final function of the suffix *-ehe* to be discussed is illustrated in (15):

- (15) keye·hapa=ke·h=wi·na I                      še=meko                      e·šimikehe  
in.fact=but=contrast                      just=emph                      tell.thus.to X-1/changed.unreal  
'But it turned out that I was being told fibs.' Auto13D

The verb in (15) is inflected in the changed unreal, which is used to express the speaker's surprise. Such verbs occur with the particle *keye·hapa* 'in fact'. It may seem strange to classify this construction with irrealis functions, since what the construction reports is what the state of events really is. However, irrealis morphology has been reported for constructions expressing surprise in other languages; cf. James 1982 on the Latin past indicative [which has other irrealis uses] and Chafe 1994 on the Caddo irrealis used with the Admirative prefix. What seems to warrant irrealis in such cases is that the situation is counter to the speaker's expectations, rather than being contrary to fact.

### Historical and comparative comments

Fox *-ehe* < PA *\*-sa(n)*. (Goddard, p.c.)

In Proto-Algonquian, *\*-sa(n)* was opposed to *\*-pa(n)*. (Goddard 1979)

Other languages use reflexes of *\*-pan* or a combination *\*-sapan* for irrealis.

Moose Cree (James 1991; Clarke and James 1994)

- (16) kiša·spin        iskwe·wit,        ta·miloma·kosi·pan  
if                    he-be-woman he-will-be-good-looking-PRET  
'If he were a woman, he would be good-looking.'
- (17) kiša·spin        ki·-wa·pama·kopane·,        ka·ki·-wi·htama·kohta·naw  
if                    past-he-see-her-DUB-PRET past-he-will-tell-us-about-it-PRET  
'If he had seen her, he would have told us about it.'

[In Moose Cree the preterit *-pan* has an allomorph *-htay* used on independent order verbs with a nonthird person argument (James 1991:282).]

Betsiamites Montagnais (Drapeau 1984; cited in Clarke and James 1994)

- (18) nita·pi·uta·n    nu·natshissi·tena·shipan  
my-key            I-forgot-INDIR  
'It turns out that I forgot my key.' [-shipan < \*-sapan]

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