On apprehensives as bi-propositionals conditionals: an Australianist perspective

So-called *apprehensive* (or *apprehensional*, or *timitive*) grams have been identified in numerous Indigenous languages of Australia cf. (Laughren 1982, Eather 1990, Evans 1995, Angelo & Schultze-Berndt 2016), and of the Americas (Vuillermet 2018, AnderBois & Dąbkowski 2020). Capitalizing on this rich scientific context, the present talk aims at furthering our understanding of apprehensives, through (i) a sample-based typological overview, (ii) recent dedicated fieldwork on Iwaidja and (iii) by proposing a formal of apprehensive structures in Australian languages as bi-propositional conditionals – mostly negative conditionals, but also run-of-the-mill positive conditionals.

A comparative study conducted on a balanced sample of 26 Australian languages revealed some unknown (or understudied) variations in the morphosyntax and semantics of Australian apprehensives, whether as synthetic inflections (FUTIRR in Murrinh-Patha, (6)) or as periphrastic inflections (*angkad* + $V_{OPT/PR}$ in Iwaidja, *marnti*/*marndi* + V_{PR} in Mawng and Bininj Gun-wok, *ngaja* + V_{POT} in Bilinarra, etc.). This paper focuses on apprehensive structures marked by verbal inflections. The most common type are bi-clausal structures, especially *P*-imperative+*Q*-predictive ('you (must) *P*, or else will *Q*') (1), and *P*-prohibitive+*Q*-predictive ('don't *P*, or else will *Q*') – it corresponds to a special type of so-called 'precautioning avertives' in the literature. A novel key finding was that biclausal apprehensive structures can have symmetric marking, with *P* and *Q* bearing the same apprehensive inflection. A third major biclausal structure type, *P*-hypothetical+*Q*-Predictive, was identified ('if *P*, then will *Q*'); its connection to priority modality is pragmatic at best (Portner 2018). A fourth major biclausal type involves complement clauses of 'be frightened that *P*' constructions (3). In addition to biclausal types, mono-clausal apprehensive structures were also found to be common. Most express an open undesirable possibility (4) (which is an elliptic form of the *P-directive, Q-predictive* biclausal structure (1)) or a foreclosed, counterfactual undesirable possibility, sometimes with admonitive flavor, (5) (which is an elliptic form of the hypothetical type (2)). Unexpectedly, in languages with a symmetric marking of biclausal apprehensives, we uncovered monoclausal *negative directive* apprehensive clauses (positive forms are ruled out in said languages). They entail an 'or else will *Q*' implicit consequent (e.g., an implicit threat, (6), cf. (Green 1995: 315)). Last but not least, some languages in the sample (e.g., Worrorra) lack *bona fide* apprehensive verbal inflections; apprehensive meaning then stems from nominal marking (Gooniyandi) – or from pragmatic enrichment. The latter 'apprehensive strategies'(7), contextually construed from a general irrealis inflection, can coexist with dedicated apprehensive morphology.

(1) *kudn-uka-Ø* *ngartung mana* *angkad birta* *nganba-ya-njing* (Iwaidja)
1sg>2pl.RMOD-peep-RMOD OBL.1SG. maybe APPR otherwise 3pl>1sg.OPT-see-OPT
'Keep a lookout for me, otherwise they might see me.' (Iwaidja Dictionary)

(2) *ŋinda* *ŋaygu* *bulgugu* *wadilŋaŋu* *ŋada* *ŋinuna maŋa* *gunbalbila* (Dyirbal)
you-SA I-GEN wife-DAT swive-ƊAY-REL-NOM I-SA you-O ear-NOM cut-APPR
'If you swive my wife, I'll cut off your ears.' (Dixon 1972: 362)

(3) *wuugarra=rnayinangulu* *garra,* *ngaja=ngandibangulu* *baya-wu* (Bilinarra)
frightened=1AUG.EXC.S>3AUG.O be.PR APPR=3AUG.S>1AUG.EXC.O bite-POT
'We're frightened of them (because) they might bite us (referring to dogs).' (Meakins & Nordlinger 2013: 241)

(4) *k-ini-majpungku-n,* *marnti* *kurruni-wu-n.* (Mawng)
PR-3MA/3MA-lift.up-NP APPR 3MA/2PL-kill-NP
'The sea is rough and it might kill you.' **(>Implicit order: 'stay ashore/don't canoe')** (Singer 2006: 171)

(5) (we built a huge fire ...) *korla* *minja* *namunja ya-bburba-ma* (Nakarra)
APPR flies 3>3.IRR+follow.food-PCT
'We built a huge fire, otherwise the flies would have hung around' (Eather 1990: 347)

(6) *mere* *na-ngi-mathputh-nukun=thurru* (Murrinh-Patha)
NEG 2SGS.HANDS(8).FUTIRR-1SGO-interrupt-FUTIRR=2SGS.GO(6).FUTIRR
'Don't you continually interrupt me.' **(>Implicit threat: 'or I'll punish you')** (Nordlinger & Caudal 2012)

(7) *yama=lhangwa!* *n-ak* *nenəngkwarba* *kənə-wənyamba-dhu-Ø=ma* (Anindilyakwa)
watch.out=ABL 3M-that 3M.man IRR.3M-angry-INCH-USP=MUT
'Watch out! The man might become angry!' **(No grammatical apprehensive marker)** (Bednall 2020: 328)

The above survey, plus special fieldwork conducted on Iwaidja confirmed that some important differences exist between common types of apprehensive structures in Australia, and in e.g. the

Americas – where such grams have been most extensively studied in the recent years cf. e.g. (Vuillermet 2018, AnderBois & Dąbkowski 2020). Although several formal treatments of apprehensives can be found in the literature (Phillips 2021, Tahar 2021, AnderBois & Dąbkowski 2020), we will base our first formal treatment on (Phillips 2021), as it was devised for (Australian) Kriol apprehensives (it is *de facto* closer to apprehensives structures found in Indigenous Australian languages) and is a crucially discourse structural account, – in contrast, discursive parameters are very much left aside in other formal analyses. According to Phillips (2021:66)'s DRT-style semantic analysis (8), Kriol apprehensive structures have a negative bi-propositional conditional meaning ('*P*, otherwise Q') (Starr 2020), with modal subordination (Roberts 2020) between a negated contextual sub-DRS K_i, whose content is a fraction of that of K_i. He further argues that the content of K_{isub} is pragmatically derived from the *Question-under-Discussion* (QuD) (see (Phillips 2021:69) for details).

(8) $K_i \ominus K_j \Leftrightarrow (K_i) \wedge (\neg K_{isub} \Diamond K_j)$ ($\ominus$ is the rhetorical function denoted by *bambai*)

Generalizing this analysis to the above data raises some non-trivial issues. Thus, (8) cannot apply to positive biclausal hypothetical apprehensives such (2), as it would make the consequent dependent on the *negation* of the antecedent; but (2) is a positive conditional ('if *P*, then *Q*') with *P* non-directive, not a negative conditional ('*P* or else *Q*') with *P* directive. Applying (8) to the mono-clausal, prohibitive type (6) would also be problematic; $\neg K_{isub}$ boils down to the mere negation of the propositional content of K_i (i.e., the prohibitive antecedent), its content is not pragmatically inferred. What *is* inferred and contextually accommodated, is the (predictive) consequent (K_j in (8)). Phillips's analysis really cannot hold in (6). These problems suggest that we should assign different semantics, to different syntactic types of apprehensive structures. We will propose that we in fact need a theory resorting to SDRT-style *discourse relations* (Asher & Lascarides 2003), bearing on underspecified discourse referents (not mere sub-DRSs) in some types of apprehensive structures.

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