

# ***Pragmatic demotion and clause dependency***

## **On two atypical subordinating strategies in Lo-Toga and Hiw (Torres, Vanuatu)**

---

Alexandre FRANÇOIS

Langues et Civilisations à Tradition Orale, CNRS  
Fédération Typologie et Universaux du Langage, CNRS  
<francois@vjf.cnrs.fr>

### **Abstract**

*Among the many grammatical features which are shared between Hiw and Lo-Toga – the two Oceanic languages spoken in the Torres Islands of Vanuatu – are the semantics of Tense-Aspect-Mood markers, and their effects on the syntax of clause dependency. Even though these two languages possess a wealth of subordinators such as conjunctions or relativizers, two TAM markers show a clear propensity, in fluent speech, to do without these overt morphemes. Instead, these two TAM categories – labelled respectively “Subjunctive” and “Background Perfect” – tend to encode clause dependency by themselves, in a way that makes overt subordinators superfluous.*

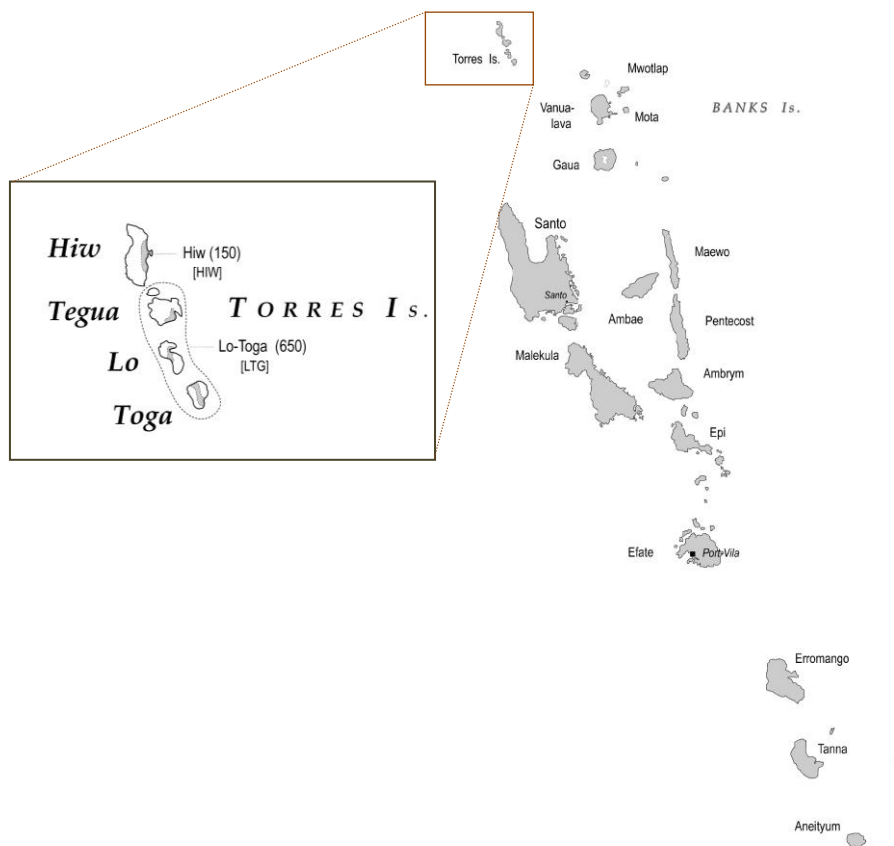
*Besides providing firsthand empirical data on two hitherto undescribed languages, this chapter proposes a functional hypothesis to account for the clause-linking power of these two TAM markers. The Subjunctive differs from other irrealis categories insofar as it lacks any specific illocutionary force. As for the Background Perfect, it labels its predicate as informationally backgrounded. In both cases, the clause lacks certain essential properties (illocutionary force; informational status) which are normally required to constitute a pragmatically well-formed sentence. This form of “PRAGMATIC DEMOTION” operated by the TAM marker thus makes the clause dependent on external predications, resulting in a genuine form of clause dependency and subordination. These two case studies illustrate how the syntax of clauses can be directly affected by the pragmatic parameters of discourse.*

## 1 Two cases of subordination with no subordinator

### 1.1 The Torres languages

The Torres islands form a small island group located at the northwestern tip of the Republic of Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides), in the south Pacific (*Map 1*).<sup>1</sup> Two Oceanic languages are spoken there: Hiw by 150 speakers, and Lo-Toga – itself consisting of two very close varieties Lo and Toga – by 650 speakers. They have never been the object of any published grammatical description.

**Map 1** - The two Torres languages, at the northwestern tip of Vanuatu



Hiw and Lo-Toga differ from each other in many regards, whether in their phonology, their lexicons, or details of their grammars – enough to make them clearly distinct, mutually unintelligible languages. Nevertheless, they also share parallel structures in most domains of their morphosyntax, their phraseology, and more generally the way they categorize meaning into forms. This linguistic isomorphism between the two Torres languages is due both to their common ancestry, and to a history of sustained social and cultural contact which their communities have long had with each other. The linguistic phenomena to be discussed in the present chapter

belong to those many structures which are shared by the two languages: this is why I will here treat them together, and illustrate each phenomenon with evidence taken alternatively from Hiw and from Lo-Toga.<sup>2</sup>

While these two Torres languages also have a lot in common with the languages of the Banks group – and of Vanuatu in general – spoken further south (*Map 1*), they present many peculiar developments, which tend to give them a grammatical profile of their own. This is especially true of the topic I will discuss here, namely the morphosyntactic strategies for encoding clause dependency and subordination. Generally speaking, as we shall see in Section 2, the various types of dependency between clauses or predicates (subordination, coordination...) are expressed – quite classically – by a variety of conjunctions and other overt morphemes that are more or less dedicated to this clause-linking function. Yet, despite the wealth of these formal devices, these two languages have also developed certain patterns of clause dependency that lack any formal subordinator.

### 1.2 Parataxis or subordination?

Considered superficially, each of the following sentences simply consists of a string of two clauses, with no formal indication whatsoever of their syntactic relationship:<sup>3</sup>

- (1) Hiw Ne temēt **on** tō yaqe me n̄wě ne, tek̄nwa voyi.  
 ART devil SBJV go:SG appear hither like this people AOR:RUN.AWAY  
 [lit. The devil would appear like this, people ran away.]  
 ‘(Whenever) the devil appeared, people would run away.’
- (2) LTG Ne gehuh **ve** kerkur tēle **si** mat mēt.  
 ART coconut.crab BKPF<sub>1</sub> ITER~CRUNCH person BKPF<sub>2</sub> CPLT die  
 [lit. The coconut crab has devoured people has died.]  
 ‘The coconut crab (which) had devoured people was dead.’

One might propose to see in these two sentences examples of simple clause parataxis (cf. Noonan 1985:55), or perhaps of verb serialization. In fact I will show that (1) and (2) rather illustrate genuine patterns of syntactic subordination, in the full sense of the term.

While such instances of apparent clause parataxis are frequent in the spontaneous speech of the two Torres languages, they are much more constrained than they seem to be at first sight, and depend on the Tense-Aspect-Mood marking (TAM) on the verbs. Among the many TAM categories – about sixteen – present in each of these two languages, *only two* appear to trigger seemingly paratactic structures of this sort. One belongs to the domain of irrealis modality, and is called the **Subjunctive** (‘SBJV’); this appears as *on* in the Hiw sentence (1). The other one belongs to the set of realis TAM markers, and more precisely to the perfect aspect; due to its particular properties, I propose to label it the **Background Perfect** (‘BKPF’) – represented by *ve... si* in (2).

Ultimately, these two TAM categories – each one for distinct reasons and through different mechanisms – can be said to convey the status of their clause as being

syntactically subordinate to another main clause. In other words, apparently paratactic sentences such as (1)-(2), even though they may lack any formal conjunction, can still be said to be *formally marked as subordinate*: this information is conveyed by the TAM marking on the verb, instead of being coded by clause linkers. Thus, the first clause in (1) is marked as a dependent clause by the presence of the Subjunctive; likewise, the first predicate phrase of (2) is formally identifiable as a subordinate (relative) clause through the use of the Background Perfect.

### 1.3 Formal properties, functional mechanisms

In this study, I intend not only to establish the empirical facts for these two undescribed languages, but also to propose a functional interpretation and discussion. I will adopt a functionalist perspective on this set of linguistic facts, and suggest that the syntactic effect of these two TAM categories, rather than just a purely formal property, can be shown to result from their semantic and pragmatic value.

In a nutshell, the core function of the Subjunctive in the Torres languages<sup>4</sup> is to represent a virtual state of affairs, with no further information on modality or illocutionary force. This pragmatic indeterminacy is fundamentally the reason why a subjunctive clause will need to attach itself to another clause, which can provide it with the modality value it lacks. Likewise, the Background Perfect can be defined as a perfect aspect which demotes its predicate from the scope of the informational focus. Due to this backgrounded status, the predicate will then need to attach itself to another element under focus, in order to form a valid utterance.

The two cases thus appear to follow similar logics. Intrinsically, each of these two TAM markers combines its purely semantic value (in terms of aspect or modality) with some pragmatic property. In both cases, this property corresponds to a form of **PRAGMATIC DEMOTION** – lack of a specific illocutionary force for the Subjunctive, lack of focal status in the case of the Background Perfect – and in both cases, this demotion results in a form of clause dependency. While they are ultimately grounded in the pragmatic dimension of discourse, these two TAM-based strategies also end up affecting the formal syntax of the sentence, as they constitute a routinized device for encoding clause subordination.

The following sections are organized as follows. Section 2 will provide a brief syntactic overview of the two Torres languages, and pay special attention to overtly marked clause-linking strategies – whether subordination, coordination or verb serialization. Section 3 will then examine in detail the functional and formal behaviour of the Subjunctive, and section 4 will be dedicated to the subordinating power of the Background Perfect.

## 2 Clause linking in the Torres languages: an overview

I will begin this study with an overview of the syntactic structures of the two Torres languages, with a special focus on clause linking strategies.

### 2.1 Syntax of the simple clause

#### 2.1.1 Coding of arguments

Like their Oceanic neighbours of Vanuatu, Hiw and Lo-Toga possess an accusative alignment system, and follow a strict SVO constituent order. Subjects take the form of noun phrases or free pronouns preceding the verb, and are not cross-referenced on the predicate itself. Likewise, direct objects usually leave the verb form unchanged (3a), except when they have human reference. In the latter case, the verb form becomes marked for transitivity (3b), and sometimes bears a suffix cross-referencing the object (3c):

(3a) LTG Nēke na **itē** n' eñwe mē-he si.  
 1SG PRF<sub>1</sub> see ART house POSS-3PL PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 'I've seen their house(s).'

(3b) LTG Nēke na **ise** kemi si.  
 1SG PRF<sub>1</sub> see:TR 2PL PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 'I've seen you<sub>[+HUMAN]}'</sub>

(3c) LTG Nēke na **isi-he** si.  
 1SG PRF<sub>1</sub> see:TR-3PL PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 'I've seen them<sub>[+HUMAN]}'</sub>

#### 2.1.2 Tense-Aspect-Mood categories

Besides its arguments, a well-formed verb phrase entails the presence of a marker coding for aspect, mood and polarity. These three parameters are subsumed under a single paradigm of portmanteau morphemes. For example, the marker labelled Complete (a postclitic *piti* in Hiw, a proclitic *mat* in Lo-Toga) encodes simultaneously an aspectual value (completed event), a modal value (indicative), and a polarity value<sup>5</sup> (affirmative):

(4a) Hiw Sise motřig **piti**.  
 3PL sleep:PL CPLT

(4b) LTG Nihe **mat** metur.  
 3PL CPLT sleep  
 'They've already slept.'

The category of tense properly speaking is not marked in these languages. Although the paradigm of verb modifiers should thus be designated, strictly speaking, as A-M-P markers (for “Aspect-Mood-Polarity”), throughout this chapter, I shall nevertheless continue to use the widespread abbreviation TAM (for “Tense Aspect Mood”), for the reader's convenience.

The two Torres languages possess sixteen formally distinct<sup>6</sup> TAM categories. The realis markers (see §4.1) include the Stative, the Imperfective, the standard Perfect, the Background Perfect, as well as the Complete, the Recent Perfect, and the Realis Negative. The irrealis categories (see §3.3) include the Future, the Prospective, the Potential, the Apprehensive, the Subjunctive, the Counterfactual, and the Irrealis Negative. Finally, two categories – labelled Aorist (see §2.2.1) and Time Focus – span over the realis and the irrealis domains.<sup>7</sup>

The Aorist is a particularly polysemous category, found in the Torres<sup>8</sup> as well as several of the Banks islands to the south (François, in press). It covers several values, both realis and irrealis, including narrative, sequential, generic, prospective, imperative and conditional. A possible description of the Aorist would be to consider it as a “zero” verbal category that is underspecified with regard to tense, aspect and mood; this would account for both its great flexibility, and its compatibility with modally bound dependent clauses (12). Interestingly, the Subjunctive [Hiw *on*, LTG *vě(n)*] can be analysed along similar lines – in terms of semantic underspecification – except that it is restricted to irrealis clauses (see §3). As we will see later, the two markers can be synonymous in certain contexts – compare (12) and (38) for modality-bound complement clauses; or (32f) and (35b) for the hortative. Yet even though the Aorist and the Subjunctive show a certain degree of functional overlap, the Subjunctive will be preferred when the semantic status of the subordinate clause is explicitly irrealis or generic.

### 2.1.3 Syntactic categories and their predicativeness

Another important characteristic of the Torres languages – and of many languages of the area more generally (François 2005a) – is the diversity of parts of speech that are compatible with the predicate function. A predicate head<sup>9</sup> need not be a verb: it can be an adjective, a noun, a numeral, etc. For example, a nominal predicate takes the form of a simple noun phrase in a direct (zero) construction, with no copula – whether it is equational (type ‘*X is the N*’) or ascriptive (‘*X is an N*’).

- (5) Hiw    Nine    { *řekño-k* }.  
           3SG        mother-1SG  
           ‘She (is) my mother.’

When the subject is omitted, the result is a clause that consists of just a single noun phrase:

- (6) Hiw    (∅)    { *ne wake* }.  
           ART    canoe  
           ‘(It’s) a canoe.’            [DIRECT NOUN PREDICATE]

Several other word classes may also be directly predicative. This includes locative phrases – whether in the form of adverbs [e.g. the interrogative ‘where’ in (7)] or prepositional phrases [see *yö köñ* in (54)] – as well as certain invariant words [e.g. the existential predicate ‘not exist, lack’ in (7)].

- (7) LTG Ne heñwëvot mino {evë}? – Nie {tategë}.  
 ART knife my where 3SG NEG:EXIST  
 ‘Where (is) my knife? – It is not here.’

Direct predicativeness (Lemaréchal 1989, Launey 1994) constitutes an important property of parts of speech in the Torres languages, which will later prove crucial in the syntactic analysis of the Background Perfect (§4.2.2.2).

## 2.2 Subordination

Hiw and Lo-Toga possess a wide array of morphological devices in order to encode the syntactic relations between a subordinate and a main clause. I will examine successively the coding of complement clauses (§2.2.1); conditional clauses (§2.2.2); relative clauses (§2.2.3); and adverbial time clauses (§2.2.4).

### 2.2.1 Complement clauses

The Torres languages have a quotative particle (HIW *tom*, LTG *të*) to introduce direct reported speech. It can be used as the unique predicate of the clause, or in combination with a verb of speech:

- (8) HIW Tema-ne yur-mi-e **tom** “Ye nëne?” **Tom** “Noke!”  
 father-3SG ask-TR-3SG QUOT who that QUOT 1SG  
 ‘Her father asked her [saying]: “Who was that?” [She said] “That was me!”.’

The same quotative particle is used to introduce indirect speech. Despite its obvious origin as a quotative, it is then better analyzed, synchronically, as a complementizer. Indeed it can combine not only with verbs of speech, but also with all sorts of verbs governing a clause complement:<sup>10</sup>

- (9) HIW Noke tati mënëg, noke ttöm **tom** ne gë kye.  
 1SG NEG steal 1SG think COMP ART thing my  
 ‘I didn’t steal it, I thought (*that*) it was mine.’
- (10) LTG Ne ñwië ni holōq me, ni itë **të** nihe ve toge.  
 ART devil AOR:3SG return hither AOR:3SG see COMP 3PL IPFV stay  
 ‘The devil came back, and saw (*that*) they were there.’

If the complement clause is realis, its predicate is normally compatible with any realis TAM marker (Perfect, Stative, Imperfective...), with no particular restriction. The same applies if the clause is semantically unrealis but is modally independent from the main clause. For example, a main verb meaning ‘believe’ would allow the complement clause to take essentially the same TAM markers as in an independent clause. As we shall see in §3.3.1, there are quite a few unrealis markers which correspond to this definition, for example the Potential (HIW *ta*, LTG *si*):

- (11) LTG N' ige wë ne, nëke dōem **të** nëke **si** gën.  
 ART fish like this 1SG think COMP 1SG POT:AFF eat  
 ‘This sort of fish, I think I *can* eat.’

Conversely, certain types of predicates – typically, verbs of volition and

manipulation – entail that the irrealis complement clause is bound to the main clause with respect to modality. In that case, the choice of TAM marking in the complement clause becomes essentially restricted to two possible categories: the Subjunctive [see (37)-(38) below] or the Aorist (12).

- (12) LTG Ne lie-k na ñih **tě** **KE** tun dë sa ñwil.  
 ART mind-1SG STAT want COMP AOR:1SG buy from M chief  
 ‘I’d like to buy it from the chief.’

Purpose clauses are also constructed along the same patterns (COMP + Aorist or COMP + Subjunctive): see (39)-(40) and (62)-(63) below. Once again, in this irrealis context, the Subjunctive and the Aorist are essentially equivalent (cf. §2.1.2).

The combination of the complementizer with Aorist markers has also grammaticalized, in Lo-Toga (but not in Hiw), into a TAM category in its own right, called the Prospective. Its meanings encompass the desiderative (‘want to do’), the deontic (‘should do’, ‘must do’), the prospective proper (‘be about to do’)...<sup>11</sup> Although it originally incorporates the complementizer *tě*, this Prospective marker can appear on the main predicate of an independent clause – as in (32c) below – which shows that it has lost any connection with clause dependency. This is also proven by the possibility of combining the Prospective (here *tě we* ‘Prosp:2sg’) with the complementizer *tě* in the same sentence:

- (13) LTG Tate pero **tě** nike **TĚ** **WE** hadit.  
 NEG:REAL long COMP 2SG PROSP 2SG be.initiated  
 [lit. It's not long before you're going to be initiated]  
 ‘You are soon going to follow the initiation rituals.’

The category of the Future is in turn a composite morpheme, which combines the Prospective (*tě*+Aorist) with a particle *ake* – see (15), (26), (32a).

### 2.2.2 Conditional clauses

Conditional clauses may again involve the same complementizer (HIW *tom*, LTG *tě*), which is here translated ‘if’:

- (14) HIW **Tom** ike gengon ñwō, ne ga tat qisi tiṛtiṛ ike.  
 COMP 2SG AOR:eat first ART kava NEG:IRR hit:TR strong 2SG  
 ‘If you eat first, the kava won't have any strong effect upon you.’

The conditional subordinator also displays longer forms which are derived from the complementizer. One thus finds the (semantically non-compositional) combination HIW *tom* + *ñwě* ‘like’ → *tom-ñwě* or *tom-ñwě-tom* meaning ‘if’ – see (49). Lo-Toga has exactly parallel forms, either morphologically transparent (*tě* + *wě* ‘like’ → *těwě* [təwɛ] ‘if’) or with a slight vowel change *těwě* → *təwɛ* [təwɛ] ~ *təwě-tě* [təwɛtɛ] – see (15), (48).

Several TAM categories can be found in the protasis of a conditional sentence: Aorist; Subjunctive; Counterfactual (15):



- (15) LTG **Tewētē** **TE** not ne metē-ne **SI**, nie tē n' ake mēteqa ē!  
 if CTFC<sub>1</sub> hit ART eye-3SG CTFC<sub>2</sub> 3SG FUT<sub>1</sub> 3SG FUT<sub>2</sub> blind OBL  
 'If they had hit his eyes, he would have become blind!'

We will see later (§3.5.2) that, while conditional constructions can make use of a conjunction, they are also regularly coded by the Subjunctive alone. This TAM marker is the only one showing this ability of replacing a conditional conjunction.

### 2.2.3 Relative clauses

Relative clauses are marked by a variety of morphological devices. The role of relativizer can be played, in both languages, by the (polyfunctional) form *pe*:

- (16) LTG Noke tē ke vē k' itē ne gehuh  
 1SG PROSP 1SG go 1SG see ART coconut.crab  
**pe** ve kerkur tēle nōk.  
 REL IPFV IPFV~crunch person there  
 'I'll go and have a look at that coconut crab *WHICH* devours people.'

The function of relativizer can also be played by phonologically heavier forms; these combine several morphemes in ways that semantically are not always compositional. One thus finds a relativizer Hiw *petom* ~ LTG *petē*, etymologically a combination {relativizer + complementizer} [see also (41) below]:

- (17) Hiw Sise mi nō-sa tīr n̄wute **petom** sise toge ie yō n̄wřēwōn.  
 3PL with POSS-3PL true place REL 3PL stay:PL OBL:ADV LOC forest  
 'They have special places of theirs, *WHERE* they dwell in the forest.'

Lo-Toga also combines the relativizer *pe* with the comparative *wē* 'like' (→ LTG *pewē*), generally with virtual or generic referents (*whoever...*):

- (18) LTG Ni ole ne wuhe hi heñwere **pewē** na mōo.  
 AOR:3SG give ART potion DAT people REL STAT sick  
 'He provides medicine to *WHO(EVER)* is sick.'

In fact the form *wē* alone (without *pe*) can also serve as a relativizer in Lo-Toga – see (42). To sum up, the forms of the relativizer in Hiw are *pe* or *petom*; those in Lo-Toga are *pe*, *petē*, *pewē* or *wē*.

Finally, despite the wealth of these relativizers, it is also common for relative clauses to lack any formal subordinator, provided the status of the whole phrase as a dependent clause is visible on the TAM marking of its verb. This ability to constitute a relative clause with no relativizer is attested only with two TAM categories, precisely those which form the topic of the following sections: the Subjunctive (§3.5.2), and the Background Perfect (§4.2.2.1).

### 2.2.4 Adverbial time clauses

Adverbial time clauses are often formed with a noun meaning “time, moment”: Hiw *tamerēn* ~ (*take*)*timerēn*, LTG *mowe*. The time clause can then be construed as a relative clause (see Thompson & Longacre 1985: 179) – i.e. *when* = literally *the time in which...*

- (19) Hiw Ike yo-ie ti *timeṛēn* *pe* kimiṛe ně yumegov qē,  
 2SG see-3SG PRF time REL 2DU STAT young still  
*tameṛēn* *pe* tekñwa te yō vōnyō ve tetaywō.  
 time REL people from LOC village IPFV celebrate  
 ‘You met her (at a time) WHEN you both were still young,  
 AS the villagers were celebrating.’

But it also commonly happens that the same word appears on its own, with no overt relativizer:

- (20) LTG *Mowe* ne tarepi ēke mat tēh pah,  
 time/when ART body canoe CPLT carve finish  
 pahvēn ge rak ne hēm' in.  
 then AOR:PL make ART outrigger its  
 ‘ONCE the body of the canoe is carved, [then] one makes the outrigger.’

It could be proposed to see *mowe* here still as a noun ‘time’ followed by a relative clause with no relativizer; however, such relative clauses, as mentioned in §2.2.3, are normally restricted to two TAM markers. The presence in (20) of another TAM category (*mat* ‘Complete aspect’) calls for another syntactic analysis: namely, that the noun *mowe* has been grammaticalized into a subordinator ‘when’.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, Lo-Toga also has a genuine time subordinator *nonegē* ‘when, as’:

- (21) LTG *Nonegē* nie ve vin-gē ne megole, ni hur ne vete sise.  
 as 3SG IPFV climb-APPL ART child AOR:3SG sing ART song one  
 ‘As she was climbing with her baby, she began to sing a song.’

We shall see other cases where time clauses lack an overt subordinator, the relation of dependency being only reflected by the TAM marking on the verb: the Subjunctive (§3.5.2).

### 2.3 Coordination

The Torres languages make relatively little use of coordination, and generally prefer resorting to subordinating or serialising strategies.

Following a typologically common trend (Stassen 2000), the Torres languages usually form the equivalent of coordination between two noun phrases by using the comitative preposition *mi* ‘with’:

- (22) Hiw tema-ne *mi* ṛekñā-ne  
 father-3SG with/and mother-3SG  
 ‘his father WITH/AND his mother’

Quite originally, Lo-Toga has extended the use of this comitative preposition to coordination between any two phrases, including two prepositional phrases (23) or two clauses (24):

- (23) LTG Noke na melekelake *pi* megole *mēke*, *mi* *pi* lēgie *mēke*.  
 1SG STAT happy about child your and about wedding your  
 ‘I’m delighted about your baby, \*with/AND about your wedding.’

- (24) LTG Ne *n̄*wië si dahia ē ne tēle, *mi* nihe si kur verië ne tēle.  
 ART devil POT harm OBL ART person and 3PL POT crunch also ART person  
 ‘Devils can harm people, \*with/AND they can even devour people.’

This functional extension of *mi* is unique to Lo-Toga, and even marginal in this language. It would be impossible in Hiw, where *mi* is still used strictly as a comitative preposition with a noun phrase. In order to coordinate two clauses, Hiw would have to use instead an adverb *pavēn* ‘then’:

- (25) Hiw Timeřēn ēne, nine nē n̄wotoy kē, *pavēn* n' uy ena nē teytoy.  
 time that 3SG STAT short little then ART hair her STAT plaited  
 ‘At that time, she was a little short, AND her hair was plaited.’

Other coordinate constructions include words for ‘but’ (Hiw/LTG *pa*), ‘or’ (Hiw *titom*, LTG *hitē*), or ‘because’ (Hiw [*ur*] *nēpe* [*tom*], LTG *nawē*).

#### 2.4 Verb serialization

Finally, this rapid overview of clause linkage in Hiw and Lo-Toga should mention, albeit briefly, verb serialization. Serial verbs in these two languages take two distinct forms.

The structure which is typologically known as *nuclear-layer* serialization (Foley & Olson 1985; Crowley 1987, 2002) consists in joining two verb radicals together with no intervening element, as if through a process of lexical compounding. The resulting “macro-verb” behaves in many regards as a single verbal unit, taking no more than one subject and one object:

- (26) LTG Tē w' ake *vese* *vahē* noke ē ne iē ige.  
 FUT<sub>1</sub> 2SG FUT<sub>2</sub> say show 1SG OBL ART name fish  
 [lit. You will say show me of fish names]  
 ‘You will teach me the names of fish.’

In this pattern of nuclear-layer serialization, the second verb modifies the first verb, semantically as much as syntactically (Bril 2004, François 2004).

The Torres languages have also developed a pattern of *core-layer* serialization, whereby two verbs follow each other in a single clause, yet each one bears its own TAM marker (or at least the proclitic part in case of discontinuous markers). This TAM marker is normally the same for the two verbs:

- (27) LTG Noke **NA** *vēn* **NA** *vivdē* **SI** l' ēñwe rōor.  
 1SG PRF<sub>1</sub> go PRF<sub>1</sub> pray PRF<sub>2</sub> LOC house holy  
 ‘I went to pray in the church.’

This is an example of “concordant marking of tense-aspect-mood”, to use the terms in Aikhenvald (2006: 42).

The latter pattern is especially used when *V*<sub>1</sub> is a verb of motion (*go, run...*) or of posture (*sit, stand...*). One of the derived uses of this serial structure, involving a posture verb in the *V*<sub>1</sub>-slot, codes for progressive aspect:

(28a) LTG Noke **ve** *gel* **ve** *hiar* ne heñwëvot mino.  
 1SG IPFV stay IPFV seek ART knife my  
 [lit. I stay I search my knife]  
 'I am looking for my knife.'

This progressive construction involves either the Imperfective *ve* (cf. §4.1.1) as in (28b), or the semantically "neutral" aspect called Aorist (§2.1.2). In this case, the very special morphology of the Aorist (fn.8 p.1) makes the serial pattern less easy to detect:

(28b) LTG Noke ( $\emptyset$ ) *gel* **ke** *hiar* ne heñwëvot mino.  
 1SG AOR stay AOR:1SG seek ART knife my  
 'I am looking for my knife.'

In all these cases, the sharing of arguments and of TAM marking – whether it occurs once or is repeated – clearly shows that we are dealing with serial verb constructions<sup>13</sup>, and hence with single clauses (Durie 1997, Brill 2004). As such, these structures do not illustrate patterns of clause linking strictly speaking, but rather linkage strategies between predicates.

### 3 The Subjunctive: In search of an illocutionary force

The preceding section has shown the wide array of formal devices used by the two Torres languages to encode dependency relations between clauses and predicates, whether in the form of verb serialization, coordination, or subordination. Despite the wealth of these clause-linking devices, two TAM categories, the Subjunctive and the Background Perfect, present an atypical behaviour: these two markers, and only these, show a strong tendency not only to combine with subordinate clauses, but also to directly encode clause dependency, even in the absence of any subordinating device (see §1.2).

I shall detail these two cases successively: the Subjunctive in the present section, and the Background Perfect in section 4.

#### 3.1 Presentation

The Subjunctive was first exemplified in sentence (1), reproduced below:

(1) Hiw Ne *temët* **on** *tō* *yaqe* *me* *ñwë* *ne*, *tekñwa* *voyi*.  
 ART devil SBJV go:SG appear hither like this people AOR:FUN.away  
 [lit. The devil would appear like this, people ran away.]  
 '(Whenever) the devil appeared, people would run away.'

The behaviour of the Subjunctive is parallel in Hiw (form *on*) and in Lo-Toga (forms *vě* ~ *věñ*).<sup>14</sup> One question arises: what exactly is the mechanism that makes this Subjunctive marker so intimately connected with subordination? Why is it that all other TAM categories – including the various irrealis markers – require the presence of overt subordinators, whereas the Subjunctive can easily do without them? Could one go as far as to consider this morpheme as intrinsically endowed with a

subordinating power?

The position I will adopt here is the following: the syntactic properties of the Torres Subjunctive, in terms of its ability to encode subordination, can be understood as an indirect consequence of fundamentally semantic properties: this marker codes an event as merely irrealis, *with no further specification of any illocutionary force*. This **modal and pragmatic indeterminacy** accounts for the inability of the Subjunctive alone to constitute well-formed utterances, and ultimately helps explain its strong tendency to trigger syntactic dependency between clauses.

### 3.2 A note on irrealis sentences

An irrealis sentence involves the representation of a virtual situation which has no other reality than that of a mental construct in the speaker's speech. Unlike realis events, whose existence is a fact and which may therefore be recounted as such, an irrealis situation cannot simply stand on its own: in order to form a pragmatically well-formed utterance, it needs to be embedded in some form of secondary predication, whether a deontic predicate, an epistemic judgment, or a speech act of some sort.

For example, let's consider the state of affairs {BABY GET SICK}. When one refers to a realis event like (29), that state of affairs can easily be stated and provided with various semantic properties, such as time coordinates and truth value:

(29) ENG *Baby got sick again last week.*

Conversely, the same state of affairs in an irrealis context (i.e. *the possibility that Baby gets sick at some point in the future*) will not be able to constitute, by itself, a complete utterance. Even the English sentence (30), which is syntactically complete and grammatical, appears to be an ill-formed utterance from the pragmatic point of view:

(30) ENG *Suppose Baby got sick.*

A sentence like (30) is felt to be incomplete, as if waiting for the rest of the sentence in order to be interpretable.<sup>15</sup>

To use the terminology of Simon Dik's Functional Grammar, a sentence like (30) does little more than merely represent a possible State of Affairs – i.e. “the conception of something that can be the case in some world” (Dik 1989: 46). In order to constitute a well-formed utterance, such a virtual situation needs to be encapsulated within some type of higher-level linguistic operation – such as aspect and time operators that would provide it with the status of a “Possible fact”; or illocutionary force and modal values that would make it a pragmatically complete “Speech act”.

For example, the virtual state of affairs mentioned above could be incorporated within various forms of speaker-centered speech acts – e.g. apprehension, wish, prediction, etc.:

(31a) ENG *I fear Baby might get sick.*

(31b) ENG I wish *Baby got sick!*

(31c) ENG [Given what I know, I hereby predict that] *Baby will get sick.*

It may as well take the form of a question, anchoring the modal center upon the addressee (31d):

(31d) ENG [According to you] *will Baby get sick?*

It may also be encapsulated within a conditional structure, whether as the protasis (31e-f) or as the apodosis (31g):

(31e) ENG In case *Baby gets sick*, he will need to take this medicine.

(31f) ENG Every time *Baby gets sick*, he tends to recover within two or three days.

(31g) ENG If he goes out in that cold weather,  
[I hereby predict that] *Baby will get sick.*

In all these sentences, the virtual situation – which by itself has no pragmatic value – comes explicitly incorporated within a higher-level predication involving a specific speech act or modal attitude (prediction, wish, apprehension...). This is what makes them capable of forming a valid utterance, unlike (30) above.

### 3.3 Two types of irrealis markers in the Torres languages

These preliminary remarks about the nature of irrealis utterances should help understand the facts of Hiw and Lo-Toga. In each of these two languages, a semantically irrealis verb can be associated with two types of TAM markers: (a) modally specified markers, (b) a modally underspecified marker, the Subjunctive.

#### 3.3.1 Modally specified irrealis TAM markers

One set of irrealis TAM markers consists not only in representing a state of affairs as virtual; they also inherently convey a specific modal value and/or speech act (such as prediction, order, warning, etc.) within which this state of affairs is logically embedded. In a way, these modally specified morphemes could be described as semantically composite, as they combine the [+irrealis] feature with some other modal specification. It is therefore not surprising – following the reasoning in §3.2 – that they should be capable of forming pragmatically well-formed, complete utterances.

In Lo-Toga,<sup>16</sup> this first set of irrealis markers includes the affirmative Future *të n'ake* in (32a) and its negative counterpart *tat* in (32b); the Prospective *të ni* in (32c); the affirmative Potential *si* in (32d) and its negative counterpart *tat ho* in (32e); the Aorist used for orders in (32f); the Apprehensional *mik* in (32g).

(32a) LTG Nie            **të**    **n'**    **ake**    metur    l-eñwe    mino.  
3SG:INDEP    FUT<sub>1</sub>    3SG:S    FUT<sub>2</sub>    sleep    LOC-house    my  
(*I predict/promise...*) 'He will sleep in my house.'

(32b) LTG Nie            **tat**            metur    l-eñwe    mino.  
3SG:INDEP    NEG:IRR    sleep    LOC-house    my  
(*I predict/forbid...*) 'He won't sleep in my house.'

- (32c) LTG Nie        **të**     **ni**        metur    l-eñwe    mino.  
 3SG:INDEP    PROSP    3SG:S    sleep    LOC-house    my  
 (*I recount somebody else's desire...*)  
 'He'd like to sleep/He's supposed to sleep... in my house.'
- (32d) LTG Nie        **si**        metur    l-eñwe    mino.  
 3SG:INDEP    POT:AFF    sleep    LOC-house    my  
 (*I allow or state a factual possibility...*)  
 'He can sleep in my house.'
- (32e) LTG Nie        **tat**        **ho**        metur    l-eñwe    mino.  
 3SG:INDEP    NEG:IRR    POT:NEG    sleep    LOC-house    my  
 (*I state a factual impossibility...*)  
 'He cannot sleep in my house.'
- (32f) LTG Nie        **ni**        metur    l-eñwe    mino!  
 3SG:INDEP    AOR:3SG    sleep    LOC-house    my  
 (*I order/suggest...*) 'Let him sleep in my house!'
- (32g) LTG Nie        **mik**        metur    l-eñwe    mino!  
 3SG:INDEP    APPR        sleep    LOC-house    my  
 (*I present a situation as undesirable...*)  
 '(I fear) he might sleep in my house!'

### 3.3.2 The Subjunctive, a modally underspecified TAM marker

In addition to these “modally specified” markers, the two Torres languages possess another irrealis marker with slightly different properties. This proclitic, which I label the Subjunctive, belongs to the same morphosyntactic paradigm as the TAM markers cited in (32a-g).

The reason for treating this morpheme separately is not morphological, but semantic. In itself, the Subjunctive provides the clause with no specific modality nor illocutionary force of any kind, and appears to convey the sole meaning [+irrealis]. To use Dik's terms, it does nothing else than represent a purely virtual *State of affairs*. It is therefore hardly surprising (following §3.2) that the Subjunctive alone is unable to form a pragmatically valid declarative sentence:

- (33a) Hiw \*N'     **on**     mitir     yö-ñwe    kye.  
 3SG     SBJV    sleep:SG    LOC-house    my
- (33b) LTG \*Nie     **vën**     metur     l-eñwe    mino.  
 3SG     SBJV    sleep     LOC-house    my  
 (*'for him to sleep in my house'...*)

A declarative sentence like (33a-b) would be felt to be truncated or unfinished, in a way very similar to (30) in English. This can be explained if one remembers that a virtual state of affairs can only form a complete sentence if it is embedded in a higher-level linguistic operation. While the various irrealis morphemes cited in (32a-g) incorporate that linguistic operation intrinsically, this is not the case for the Subjunctive (33a-b), which remains MODALLY UNDER-SPECIFIED.

This semantic property of the Torres Subjunctive entails an important corollary:

its *high potential for syntactic dependency*. Due to its pragmatic incompleteness, a Subjunctive clause will need to hook on to some other clause or predication operator, in order to form a valid sentence. This essentially implies that the Subjunctive has a strong affinity with syntactic subordination – hence my choice for its name. In various cases, this affinity means that the Subjunctive will combine with/be required by formal subordinators, in a way reminiscent of the subjunctives found in European languages. But quite often – and crucially for the topic of the present volume – the syntactic consequence will be that the Torres Subjunctive is capable of *creating* a relation of dependency between two clauses, *even in the absence of any specific subordinator*.

These issues will form the essentials of the discussion in §3.5. But before we turn to them, it is necessary to address the paradox of the hortative.

### 3.4 The special case of the hortative

The preceding paragraphs may have given the impression that the Torres languages make it impossible for an utterance to consist of a single clause marked as Subjunctive. Even though this may be indeed very close to the truth, there is in fact one exception to this generalization: the case of third-person hortatives.

When the speaker orders that an action be performed by the addressee, he will use an *imperative*. In the Torres languages this may be marked by the Aorist, or more often by the verb alone:

- (34a) Hiw Tō me! ~ Wōt tō me!  
 go:SG hither AOR:2SG go:SG hither
- (34b) LTG Vēn me! ~ We vēn me!  
 go hither AOR:2SG go hither  
 ‘Come here!’

When the person in control of the desired state of affairs is distinct from the addressee, the corresponding speech act, described typologically as a *hortative* (van der Auwera, Dobrushina & Goussev 2008), may also be coded by the Aorist, as in (32f) above. In addition, for *third-person hortatives*, the two Torres languages can as well use their Subjunctive:

- (35a) Hiw N' on mitiř yō-nwe kye!  
 3SG SBJV sleep LOC-house my
- (35b) LTG Nie vēn metur l-eñwe mino!  
 3SG SBJV sleep LOC-house my  
 (I order/suggest...) ‘Let him sleep in my house!’

This functional equivalence between the Aorist and the Subjunctive is also found with *third-person optatives*:

- (36) LTG Ne teñwēte vēn toge mē-ke!  
 ART peace SBJV stay with-you  
 (I wish) ‘May peace be with you!’



This use of the subjunctive for hortatives or optatives is typologically common,<sup>17</sup> as witnessed by Latin *Veniat!* ‘Let him come!’ or *Pax sit semper vobiscum* ‘May peace be always with you’ (cf. Ernout & Thomas 1953: 239). However it seems to be at odds with the definition I gave of the Torres Subjunctive in §3.3.2, where it was stated that this marker does not convey any speech act value. If this is so, then where does the illocutionary force of these hortative or optative utterances find its source? And how is it possible that sentences such as (35a-b) and (36) are perfectly well-formed, while (33a-b) was ungrammatical?

The answer to this paradox does not lie within the Subjunctive itself: obviously, if the modality of hortative/optative were intrinsically built in this marker, then it should convey it in every sentence, and an utterance such as (33a-b) should be correct. This means we need to take seriously the only difference that distinguishes (33) from (35): the PROSODY – which is very roughly represented here by the punctuation. On the one hand, the prosodic contour of (33a-b), that of a declarative statement, results in the pragmatic incompleteness of the sentence. On the other hand, the prosody of (35a-b), which is characteristic of orders and exclamatory sentences – a high pitch plateau ending in an instant fall – makes the sentence grammatical.

In my interpretation, the particular suprasegmental profile of the sentence is the locus where the needed illocutionary force is lodged, and must be sought. The ungrammaticality of (33a-b) showed that the function of the Subjunctive, namely the mere representation of a virtual State of affairs, did not find enough support in the declarative modality to constitute a well-formed utterance. Conversely, what (35a-b) reveals is that an intonation typical of orders and exclamation, because it is markedly anchored in the speaker's desires and emotions, is sufficient to provide that virtual State of affairs with the modal value and illocutionary force it needs to form a correct utterance.

Semantically, this formal asymmetry indeed makes sense. Such a mental construct as a virtual state of affairs can hardly be *stated* in any way; but it still can be represented in an emotional perspective – which is what exclamatory utterances tend to mimic. This contrast accounts, respectively, for the incompatibility between the Subjunctive and the declarative modality, and for its affinity with the intonation of orders and exclamations.<sup>18</sup>

In sum, (35) and (36) constitute no exception to the general principles outlined in §3.3.2, namely that an irrealis event can constitute a sentence if, and only if, it is involved in a modal predication of some kind. But while every other irrealis TAM marker in the Torres languages has an inbuilt illocutionary force that makes it well-designed for the formation of a valid utterance – cf. (32a-g) – this is not the case with the Subjunctive, which is under-specified in this regard. As a result, the only way for a Subjunctive verb to form a correct sentence, is to receive its illocutionary force “from outside”. Most of the time, this external source for the coding of modality will

correspond to a different clause, that syntactically belongs outside the Subjunctive clause; this point will account for the strong ties of this marker with syntactic subordination (§3.5). As for (35a-b) and (36), they illustrate a more particular case, where the specific illocutionary force is lodged “outside” the verbal form strictly speaking, yet still has to be found within the formal limits of the clause itself: in its prosody.

All things considered, the functions of hortative and optative which are sometimes played by the Subjunctive do not contradict its earlier description as a *MODALLY UNDER-SPECIFIED*, indeterminate marker of irrealis.

### 3.5 From modal indeterminacy to syntactic subordination

In sum, the Subjunctive is the only irrealis TAM category of the Torres languages which does not inherently convey any modal value or illocutionary force. Unless it receives the latter from some modally charged intonation pattern, it is therefore unable to constitute a valid utterance by itself.<sup>19</sup>

The principal corollary of this description are the strong ties that exist between this irrealis TAM marker and the syntax of clause dependency. I will first review the various cases where the Subjunctive combines with a clause that is already marked formally as subordinate: complement clauses, relative clauses, conditional sentences, etc. In a subsequent section (§3.5.2), I will show that the presence of an overt subordinator is in fact not even necessary for the Subjunctive to be able to encode syntactic dependency between clauses.

#### 3.5.1 Subjunctive combined with overt subordinators

Quite often, the backgrounded clause is already marked as dependent by means of a subordinator of some sort. This is the case, for example, when a clausal complement is introduced by means of a complementizer (Hiw *tom*, LTG *tě*), after a verb of manipulation or expectation (see §2.2.1):

- (37) Hiw Mařenage sa gatēt ti tekñwa **TOM** ne vēroye **on** pa.  
 chief their say DAT people COMP ART war SBJV finish  
 [*lit.* The chief asked the people *that the war be stopped.*]  
 ‘The chief asked his people to stop the war.’

- (38) LTG Dege toge sēh **TĔ** ne gengēn **vě** howse pah.  
 1INCL:PL stay wait COMP ART food SBJV cooked finish  
 ‘Let’s wait till the food is completely cooked.’

The same formal structure {complementizer + Subjunctive} is used for purpose clauses, whether with the same or with a different subject from the main clause.

- (39) Hiw Sise myō ti ne tōt ga ñot **TOM** sise **on** ni yō gemoy.  
 3PL pull PRF ART root kava one COMP 3PL SBJV drink LOC men’s.house  
 ‘They’ve pulled out a head of kava so as to drink it in the men’s house.’

- (40) LTG Hōr t' ō n̄wule me vete mi hōr **TĒ** nie **vě** menēwe.  
 3DU PROSP DU:S return hither place POSS 3DU COMP 3SG SBJV breathe  
 'They are going back to their place for him to get some rest.'

Syntactic dependency may also be marked by a relativizer (§2.2.3). The Subjunctive is required when the relative clause is semantically irrealis and/or generic (cf. Eng. *whoever*):

- (41) Hiw Tekn̄wa **PETOM** sise **on** tati voyi w̄rog, ne temēt qūr-ise.  
 people REL 3PL SBJV NEG escape through ART Ghost crunch-3PL  
 'All those who were unable to escape, the monster would devour them.'
- (42) LTG N' ēve **wĒ** nihe **vě** vese hivi-ke, nike rōn̄tē urvē.  
 ART thing REL 3PL SBJV say DAT-2SG 2SG listen properly  
 'Whatever they may tell you, you must obey them.'

As we saw in §2.2.4, adverbial time clauses generally take the form of a relative clause hooked on the noun 'time, moment', with or without an overt relativizer. When the time reference of the subordinate clause is irrealis or generic, the Subjunctive is expected:

- (43) Hiw **TAKETIMERĒN** **PE** ne tayō **on** mēt, tite tivid n' opē-ne.  
 time REL ART person SBJV die 1INCL:PL bury ART body-3SG  
 'When(ever) somebody dies, we bury their body.'
- (44) LTG **MOWE** **wĒ** si tēle **vě** mōo, dege leklok mē.  
 time REL some person SBJV sick 1INCL:PL help with.3SG  
 'When(ever) somebody gets sick, we help them.'
- (45) LTG **MOWE** kemē **vě** da-togin, nike v̄n me dege n̄wule.  
 time/when 1EXCL:PL SBJV be-ready 2SG go hither 1INCL:PL return  
 'When we're ready, you can come here so we can go back together.'
- (46) LTG Noke tē ke v̄n ke tugtugerē remē mino  
 1SG PROSP 1SG go 1SG watch mother my  
**MOWE** nie **vě** metur.  
 time/when 3SG SBJV sleep  
 'I will watch my mother when she's asleep.'

An irrealis clause can be embedded within another irrealis clause, in which case the Subjunctive percolates throughout. (47) shows three instances of *vě(n)*: the first one (*v̄n itē*) is due to the semantic status of the time clause as generic ('whenever'); the next two (*vě sōw vě lewō*) constitute a second level of subordination, being a complement clause within that time clause [see also (51) below]. Incidentally, the string /*vě sōw vě lewō*/ is a serial verb construction, of the type that requires the repetition of the TAM marker (see §2.4):

- (47) LTG { **MOWE** kemēm **v̄n** itē [**TĒ** ne ho in **vě** sōw **vě** lewō  
 time/when 1EXCL:PL SBJV see COMP ART leaf its SBJV grow SBJV big  
 pe si ]}, alē kemē ge lio.  
 already PRF then 1EXCL:PL AOR:PL dig.up  
 'When(ever) we see that [the taro's] leaves have grown (and become) big, we dig it up.'

Finally, the protasis of conditional sentences (§2.2.2) constitutes another structure where the Subjunctive often combines with the subordinator ‘if’:

- (48) LTG **TĒWĒTĒ** ne liō **vě** nīh, nīke si hue o rōw vete qe ē.  
 if ART mind:2SG SBJV want 2SG POT paddle out out place deep OBL  
 ‘If you want, you can also paddle (your canoe) out there into the deep sea.’
- (49) Hiw {**TOMNĒTOM** se **on** vën yō veřoye,  
 if 3PL SBJV go:PL LOC war  
 s’ **on** qētñog ne tayō ne tayō **on** qēt },  
 3PL SBJV kill:PL ART person ART person SBJV die:PL  
 sise viye n’ opë-se me se mok eře qoř.  
 3PL take:PL ART body-3PL hither 3PL put on grave  
 ‘{ If/WHEN the population went to war, and many people were killed and died }, their bodies were then collected and deposited in stone graves.’

Note that the Subjunctive never occurs in the *apodosis* of such conditional sentences, because this is a section of the sentence which needs to have its own illocutionary force – as in (31g) above.

These examples (37) to (49) all illustrate the strong links of the Subjunctive with subordinate structures. In each case, the Subjunctive verb phrase does no more than represent a virtual state of affairs which is, in itself, deprived of any inherent modal value. What then makes the clause interpretable, is its insertion – here via overt subordination – within a higher level predication, which is in turn specified for modality and illocutionary force.

### 3.5.2 The subordinating effect of the Subjunctive alone

Crucially, while the Subjunctive marker often combines with a subordinator, it turns out that it is also capable of creating an effect of syntactic dependency by itself. A clause marked as Subjunctive will spontaneously tend to develop a relationship of syntactic dependency with a matrix clause, even in the absence of any formal subordinator.

The most frequent case of “spontaneous” subordination is when the Subjunctive alone marks the protasis of a conditional sentence. Indeed, the conditional conjunctions ‘if’ – illustrated in §2.2.2 and in (48)-(49) – become optional when the verb is marked with the Subjunctive. In the majority of cases, the TAM morpheme is sufficient to encode the subordinate status of the clause:

- (50) LTG **Něke** **vě** vese tě ne genegone vě vën,  
 1SG SBJV say COMP ART war SBJV go  
 ne genegone tě ni vën.  
 ART war PROSP 3SG go  
 ‘(If) I say that the war (must) go on, then the war will go on.’
- (51) Hiw **Ik’** **on** rōñ tom sě gě **on** rāk ti,  
 2SG SBJV hear COMP some thing SBJV make PRF  
 ike ta tōw ne wēt eye.  
 2SG POT compose ART song OBL

‘(If) you hear that some event has happened,  
you can compose your song about it.’

- (52) Hiw *Ik' on sēr-ie on yoqse, n' ēptgō nēne!*  
2SG SBJV spear-3SG SBJV miss ART shame that  
‘(If) you try to spear him and you miss, then shame on you!’

Rather than hypothesizing a form of conjunction ellipsis, it is probably more accurate to suggest that the semantic dependency is inherently encapsulated in the modal morpheme itself.<sup>20</sup> Quite often, this leads to the impression that the Subjunctive marker itself is in fact a sort of conjunction meaning ‘if’. Consider for example the idiomatic phrase ‘if not’ (Hiw *on tego*; LTG *vě tategë*):

- (53) Hiw *Tite gon ne pēta, on tego, gon ne qēte.*  
1INCL.PL eat ART yam SBJV NEG:EXIST eat ART taro  
‘We’ll eat some yam; if not (=or else), some taro.’

The similarity of the Subjunctive morpheme with a conditional conjunction is not merely an effect of translation, but also appears to be a reality for the speakers themselves. This is clear, for example, in this sentence of Hiw:

- (54) Hiw *On yö köñ, sise yö ñwutuye ne vti ve yay rē mesaye.*  
SBJV/if LOC night 3PL see only ART star IPFV shine on sky  
‘If at night, they would just watch the stars that shine in the sky.’

It is true that locative phrases – including prepositional phrases like *yö köñ* ‘at night’ – may be used with the syntactic function of predicate (§2.1.3). However, this is always done in the form of a direct predicate, incompatible with any TAM marker.<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the combination of the subjunctive *on* with the phrase *yö köñ*, rather than being seen as plain TAM marking – which would be grammatically abnormal here – should probably be better explained by a form of specialization of *on* as a form of (quasi) conjunction, similar to other conditional subordinators also present in this language (§2.2.2). Incidentally, this pattern is only attested in Hiw: Lo-Toga would have to use one of its genuine conjunctions here (*tewëtë li qeñ* ‘IF [it were] at night’). This last point tends to confirm that (54) illustrates an extreme case in the evolution path of the Subjunctive, which Hiw has reached but not its close neighbour.

When a sentence-initial clause is marked by the Subjunctive alone, it can be ambiguous between a conditional reading strictly speaking – equivalent to the *if*-clauses of (48)-(49) – and a future or generic time interpretation – corresponding to the *when*-clauses of (43)-(47) above.

- (55) Hiw *Ne ñwute on meyigeyige ttēñ, ike tēñ ar ñwutuye ne wōnaye.*  
ART place SBJV dark pitch 2SG grope seek just ART road  
‘(If/WHEN) it’s pitch dark, you just have to grope your way.’
- (56) LTG *Ne tō vě ele gega wë nōk, tate pero tē*  
ART fowl SBJV crow always like this NEG long COMP  
*ne metave ni tōt.*  
ART morning AOR chop  
‘(EVERY TIME) the cock crows like that, (this means) day is almost breaking.’

- (57) LTG *Deñwē'k noke vë ñwule, noke të k' ole si vot.*  
 today 1SG SBJV return 1SG PROSP 1SG:S take some stone  
 'Today (*WHEN*) I go back, I'll take some money with me.'

The proper interpretation will be given by the context. If the situation is expected to take place anyway – e.g. short-time visitors are expected to go back to their place sooner or later – it will translate as a *when* clause. But if the hypothesis is uncertain, then the topic clause will correspond to a conditional sentence proper. Obviously, the speakers get by perfectly with this semantic ambiguity, and do not necessarily feel the need to disambiguate these situations, even though they actually have the formal means to do so (see §2.2.2, 2.2.4).

The irrealis value of the Subjunctive does not only cover such time references as future and generic present. It is also found in past contexts – whether real or fictitious past, as in narratives – provided the event is presented as iterative:

- (58) Hiw *Tekñwa on ñwuye me ton ne řekove sa, s' on vën*  
 people SBJV return hither from ART work their 3PL SBJV go:PL  
*wate me, se vën se motřig.*  
 until hither AOR:3PL go:PL AOR:3PL sleep:PL  
 '(EVERY TIME) the group came back from their labour and reached home, they would go to sleep.'
- (59) LTG *Ne ñwië vë ere nie vete'k, ni wël vën wë nök.*  
 ART Ogre SBJV hit:SG 3SG here AOR:3SG leap thither like this  
 '(WHENEVER) the Ogre tried to hit him, he would jump away like this.'

This is where sentence (1) – cited in §1.2 – would fit:

- (1) Hiw *Ne temët on tō yaqe me ñwë ne, tekñwa voyi.*  
 ART devil SBJV go:SG appear hither like this people AOR:run.away  
 '(WHENEVER) the devil appeared, people would run away.'

This use of the Subjunctive in the expression of past iterative events in time clauses, paradoxical though it may be, finds its parallel in the “subjunctive of repetition” of Classical Latin (Ernout & Thomas 1953: 400):

- LAT *Id ubi dix-isse-t, hasta-m in fines eorum mitte-ba-t.*  
 that when say-SBJV:PLUPRF-3SG spear-ACC to territory their throw-IND:IMPRF-3SG  
 'WHEN(EVER) he thus spoke, he would throw a spear into their territory.'  
 [Livy I, 32, 13]

Irrealis relative clauses are formed along similar lines. Compare (42) above with (60), where the subordinate status is exclusively coded by the mood marker:

- (60) LTG *N' ēve ñëke vën alegōr të tat rak,*  
 ART thing 1SG SBJV forbid COMP NEG:IRR do  
*heñwere pah të ge rōntë.*  
 people all PROSP PL:S listen  
 'Whatever I may ban people from doing, they will have to comply.'

The presence of the article (*ne*) in (61) makes it clear that *mowe* is a noun meaning ‘time’ (rather than a subordinator, cf. §2.2.4), and that we are dealing here with an irrealis relative clause with no relativizer:

- (61) LTG ... vĕn wahe ne mowe nĕke **vĕn** tĕmetō.  
 go until ART time 1SG SBJV old.man  
 ‘... until the time (WHEN) I get old.’

Finally, while purpose clauses can include a complementizer as in (39)-(40) above, they may also do without any conjunction:

- (62) Hiw Noke tegtegyĕ ne megoye kye {n' **on** toge varōn}.  
 1SG IPFV~mislead ART child my 3SG SBJV stay quiet  
 ‘I’m amusing my baby (so) he keeps quiet.’

- (63) LTG We tōw ne mon, we veñkĕ ne mesor  
 AOR:2SG aim.at ART bird AOR:2SG let.go ART arrow  
 { **vĕ** vĕn **vĕ** qihe nie }.  
 SBJV go SBJV bang 3SG  
 ‘You aim at the bird, then you shoot your arrow (so) it flies and knocks it.’

### 3.6 From clause dependency to lexical derivation

The pattern illustrated in (63), whereby a purpose clause can be coded by the Subjunctive *vĕ* alone, is the source of a process of reanalysis which Lo-Toga – but not Hiw – has gone through. This process involves several steps leading to patterns of resultative (pseudo-) serialization, resultative compounding, and even causative derivation. I will conclude my analysis of the Torres Subjunctive by detailing the successive steps of this reanalysis. This will confirm the powerful affinity of the Subjunctive morpheme not only with clause dependency, but also with the binding of predicates, including an ultimate tendency towards the fusion of verb roots into one word.

Lo-Toga has developed a resultative construction that is evidently derived from the structure of purposive subordination (63), yet with a tighter relationship between the two verbal heads, in a way reminiscent of verb serialization. When a first dynamic event  $V_1$  (generally a verb of impact) results in a state  $V_2$ , then  $V_2$  is obligatorily marked as a Subjunctive. The structure {  $V_1$  *vĕ*  $V_2$  } is particularly frequent in Lo-Toga:

- (64) LTG Ole ne gi, ge tōt **vĕ** wureri, ge gĕt **vĕ** menō.  
 take ART kava AOR:PL chop SBJV small:PL AOR:PL chew SBJV soft  
 (Procedural explanations about how to process kava, a woody plant  
 which is ground and brewed into a narcotic drink)  
 ‘Take a branch of kava, mince<sub>[Aor]</sub> it small<sub>[Sbjv]</sub>, then chew<sub>[Aor]</sub> it soft<sub>[Sbjv]</sub>.’

A sentence like (62) above unambiguously consisted of two distinct clauses: the main verb was followed immediately by its object (*the baby*), and the latter referent was repeated, in the form of a pronoun, as the formal subject within the subordinate purpose clause. If we compare (62) with the two resultative constructions in (64) – respectively *tōt vĕ wureri* and *gĕt vĕ menō* – we can observe similarities and differences. On the one hand, the underlying syntactic structures are identical: the subject of  $V_2$  coincides with the object of  $V_1$ . But on the other hand, (64) shows tighter structures than (62). The two verbs are not separated by any noun phrase, whether the object of

$V_1$  or the subject of  $V_2$ ; the only morpheme that divides  $V_1$  from  $V_2$  in each construction is the Subjunctive *vě*. Phonologically speaking, the whole strings  $\{V_1\ vě\ V_2\}$  are uttered under a single contour with no internal pause, as if forming a single syntactic phrase.

The compactness of the constructions of (64) is confirmed by (65): if a noun phrase occurs, it is preferably postponed to the whole phrase  $\{V_1\ vě\ V_2\}$  rather than inserted in-between.

(65) LTG Dōr si gēt **vě** menō ne gi ne.  
 1INCL:DU POT chew SBJV soft ART kava this  
 ‘We can chew this kava soft.’

(66) LTG Dege tē ge lōv **vě** n̄wedōl ne iē tē ‘Alex’.  
 1INCL:PL PROSP PL:S call SBJV short ART your.name QUOT (name)  
 ‘We shall (*pronounce shortly* =) shorten your name to *Alex*.’

Functionally as well as formally, these strings  $\{V_1\ vě\ V_2\}$  have a lot in common with serial verb constructions (§2.4), the only difference being that the TAM marking differs between  $V_1$  and  $V_2$ . Syntactically, this sequence of verbs behaves globally like a single, transitive macro-verb. In a way, it would even make sense to understand the whole string as a single lexical unit (*gēt-vě-menō* ‘soften by chewing’; *lōv-vě-n̄wedōl* ‘shorten’), as through a process of LEXICAL COMPOUNDING.

Arguably, the form *vě* in these compound forms has gained a status of its own:<sup>22</sup> instead of coding for the Subjunctive, it could be described here as a kind of “buffer” affix linking two verb roots together, with a resultative meaning. This new analysis could result in an alternative transcription and gloss for (65):

(65’) LTG Dōr si gēt-**vě**-menō ne gi ne.  
 1INCL:DU POT chew-RESULT-soft ART kava this  
 ‘We can “soft-chew” this kava.’

Interestingly, Lo-Toga is the only language in north Vanuatu that has developed this pattern of resultative structure, using a buffer morpheme like *vě*. All its neighbours – including Hiw – would simply construct their resultative macro-verbs by resorting to a simple pattern of nuclear-layer serialization (François 2004, 2006). Thus, the equivalent of (65) in Mwotlap would be *kuy madamdaw na-ga* /chew soft ART-kava/, with nothing between the two verb radicals.

While sentences like (64)-(66) are still somewhat ambiguous and compatible with more than one interpretation, some other examples provide an even clearer case for a compounding analysis. This is especially true when the first verb before *vě* is the dummy auxiliary *da* ‘do’ (also ‘be’), which does not exist as an independent verb. The string *da-vě-* thus serves as a productive prefix in Lo-Toga for the formation of causative (transitive) verbs out of stative (intransitive) verbs or adjectives (Table 1).



**Table 1** – Resultative compounds of Lo-Toga, incorporating the Subjunctive/Resultative morpheme *vě*

| SIMPLE VERB/ ADJECTIVE |           |   | RESULTATIVE COMPOUND |                          |
|------------------------|-----------|---|----------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>menō</i>            | ‘soft’    | → | <i>gēt-vě-menō</i>   | ‘soften by chewing’      |
|                        |           | → | <i>qihih-vě-menō</i> | ‘soften by grinding’     |
| <i>ñwedōl</i>          | ‘short’   | → | <i>lōv-vě-ñwedōl</i> | ‘shorten (a name)’       |
| <i>mōo</i>             | ‘sick’    | → | <i>da-vě-mōo</i>     | ‘make s.o. sick, sicken’ |
| <i>mēmerie</i>         | ‘painful’ | → | <i>da-vě-mēmerie</i> | ‘hurt (body part)’       |
| <i>luwō</i>            | ‘big’     | → | <i>da-vě-luwō</i>    | ‘make bigger, enlarge’   |
| <i>hemrē</i>           | ‘laugh’   | → | <i>da-vě-hemrē</i>   | ‘talk playfully, joke’   |
| <i>duwēr</i>           | ‘false’   | → | <i>da-vě-duwēr</i>   | ‘pretend’                |
| <i>rōor</i>            | ‘holy’    | → | <i>da-vě-rōor</i>    | ‘consecrate, baptize’    |

(67) LTG Temētrōñ tat ho *da-vě-mōo* ne tēle.  
 healer NEG:IRR POT:NEG do-RESULT-sick ART person  
 ‘Healers cannot make people sick.’

(68) LTG Ne ri ñwēl na *deda-vě-mēmerie* ne teplē tēle.  
 ART top.of reef STAT ITER~do-RESULT-painful ART foot person  
 ‘The surface of the coral reef hurts the feet.’

(69) LTG Tate hehu *da-vě-rōor* nihe qē.  
 NEG bathe do-RESULT-holy 3PL still  
 [lit. (one) has not bathed consecrated them yet]  
 ‘They haven’t been baptized yet.’

Once again, these examples are open to two morphological analyses. It is still possible to consider them a case of compounding between two lexical roots (*da* ‘do’ + *mōo* ‘sick’), hence the gloss /do-RESULT-sick/. But due to the relative productiveness of the process, and the low semantic specificity of the first auxiliary, it would be equally accurate to speak synchronically of a process of lexical derivation that really combines a single lexical unit ( $V_2$ ) with a CAUSATIVE prefix *davě-*. In the latter case, one could rather transcribe (67) as *davě-mōo* and gloss it /CAUS-sick/.<sup>23</sup>

The historical and/or logical process outlined here can be described as a series of morphosyntactic reanalyses. Starting from a clear pattern of subordination between two clauses, each step corresponds to a tighter relationship between the verbs of each clause, and ultimately results in a specialized pattern of causative derivation (Table 2).

**Table 2** – From biclausal purpose subordination to causative derivation: the binding power of the Subjunctive

| EX.  | SYNTACTIC ANALYSIS  | ROOTS | VERBS | CLAUSES |
|------|---|-------|-------|---------|
| (40) | V <sub>1</sub> = main clause<br>V <sub>2</sub> = dependent purpose clause, with subordinator  | 2     | 2     | 2       |
| (62) | V <sub>1</sub> = main clause<br>V <sub>2</sub> = dependent purpose clause, without subordinator   | 2     | 2     | 2       |
| (64) | V <sub>1</sub> = first action in resultative (quasi) serialization<br>V <sub>2</sub> = resulting state in resultative (quasi) serialization | 2     | 2     | 1       |
| (65) | V <sub>1</sub> = first radical in resultative compound verb<br>V <sub>2</sub> = second radical in resultative compound verb                 | 2     | 1     | 1       |
| (67) | V <sub>1</sub> = (dummy verb) > <i>causative prefix</i><br>V <sub>2</sub> = stative verb, input of causative derivation                     | 1     | 1     | 1       |

### 3.7 The Subjunctive: summary

The various functions of the Subjunctive in the two Torres languages are summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3** – The narrow links of the Subjunctive with clause dependency: A summary

| SYNTAX                                    | FUNCTIONAL VALUE  | EXAMPLES               |
|---|---|------------------------|
| <b>no subordination</b>                   | hortative & optative (3sg)  | (35)-(36)              |
| <b>combines<br/>with subordinators</b>    | modally-bound complement clauses  | (37)-(38)              |
|   | purpose clauses   | (39)-(40)              |
|   | irrealis & generic relative clauses   | (41)-(42)              |
|   | irrealis adverbial time clauses   | (43)-(47)              |
|   | irrealis conditional protases   | (48)-(49)              |
| <b>directly encodes<br/>subordination</b> | irrealis conditional protases   | (50)-(52)              |
|   | ⇒ [HIW] reinterpreted as conjunction <i>if</i>  | (53)-(54)              |
|   | irrealis & generic adverbial time clauses   | (55)-(59)              |
|   | irrealis & generic relative clauses   | (60)-(61)              |
|   | irrealis purpose clauses<br>⇒ [LTG] resultative compounding<br>> causative derivation | (62)-(66)<br>(65)-(69) |

#### 4 The Background Perfect: In search of a focus

The TAM category I propose to label “Background Perfect” offers a broadly similar, yet quite distinct illustration of the phenomenon just discussed with the Subjunctive. The general mechanism behind the two patterns is the same: the semantic and pragmatic identity of a TAM marker makes it particularly prone to the syntactic coding of clause dependency. Nevertheless, the case of the perfect is sufficiently different to warrant a section of its own.

The question addressed here is the following: how can the Background Perfect marker (*ve... si*) clearly form a subordinate – relative – clause in a sentence like (2), and yet do without any overt subordinator? What is there in its makeup that makes it syntactically different from other realis categories, and especially different from the regular Perfect?

- (2) LTG Ne gehuh **ve** kerkur tēle **si** mat mēt.  
 ART coconut.crab BKPF<sub>1</sub> ITER~crunch person BKPF<sub>2</sub> CPLT die  
 [lit. The coconut crab *has devoured people* has died.]  
 ‘The coconut crab (*who*) had devoured people was dead.’

Once again, I shall argue that the syntactic power of this marker must ultimately be understood as an outgrowth of its main functional property, namely, its ability to mark the informational status of its predicate as *presupposed*. Due to this form of PRAGMATIC DEMOTION, the predicate phrase thus marked will need to search for an external focus of information, which will typically result in a syntactic relation of dependency between clauses.

##### 4.1 The two perfects and the sentential focus

Among the various TAM categories that can refer to a realis event (§2.1.2), the two languages of the Torres have a Stative, an Imperfective, and two perfects. I will briefly present the first two of these TAM markers, before I turn to the difference between the last two which are derived from them.

##### 4.1.1 Stative vs Imperfective

The Stative [Hiw *ně(gě)*, LTG *na*] is followed exclusively by stative predicates, that is, stative verbs and adjectives:

- (70) LTG Ne vavetēme mi kemi **na** deřēñha.  
 ART language POSS 2PL STAT difficult  
 ‘Your language is difficult.’

The only way for a semantically dynamic verb to be compatible with this marker is to be first converted into a habitual (and therefore stative) predicate, by means of reduplication:

- (71) LTG \*(Nēke na si.) → Nēke **na** sesi.  
 \*1SG STAT walk 1SG STAT ITER~walk  
 \*(I walk.) → ‘I usually walk, *i.e.* I am a (good) walker.’

As for the Imperfective (HIW/LTG *ve*)<sup>24</sup>, it encompasses two aspectual values (cf. Comrie 1976): the progressive (72) and the habitual (73):

- (72) LTG Remë mē **ve** kerë.  
 mother his IPFV weep  
 ‘His mother is/was weeping.’
- (73) LTG Nihe **ve** lōv nie tē “Temētrōñ”.  
 3PL IPFV call 3SG QUOT Healer  
 ‘People call him “Healer”.’

The same Imperfective *ve* also takes part in several progressive structures based on verb serialization { *ve Posture verb V<sub>1</sub> + ve Action verb V<sub>2</sub>* }: see §2.4, ex. (28a).

Verbs that are lexically stative (including adjectives) are sometimes found to combine with the Imperfective, in which case they receive a dynamic reading:

- (74a) LTG Ne vete **na** medudut.  
 ART place STAT black  
 ‘It's dark.’ [STATIVE reading]
- (74b) LTG Ne vete **ve** medudut.  
 ART place IPFV black  
 ‘It's getting dark.’ [DYNAMIC reading]

However, setting aside these rare cases, it is generally true that the Stative and the Imperfective tend to target two different sets of verbs, respectively stative and dynamic. Obviously this makes it difficult to carry any extensive comparison of these two TAM markers. But as we shall now see, the situation is totally different for the two perfects that are derived from them.

#### 4.1.2 The two perfects

I now turn to the two perfects of the Torres languages, which will form the heart of the following discussion: the regular Perfect (HIW *ně...ti*/LTG *na...si*) and the Background Perfect (HIW *ve...ti*/LTG *ve...si*).<sup>25</sup>

Morphologically speaking, one may say that these two perfect markers show a straightforward correspondence with the Stative and the Imperfective, as they simply consist of the combination of the latter with a postclitic *\*ti*.<sup>26</sup> However, this clitic *\*ti* only occurs in combination with TAM markers, with various semantic impacts, and cannot be assigned any stable meaning in itself. It is therefore methodologically safer – and probably more realistic from the speaker's point of view anyway – to consider each compound TAM marker as a single meaningful morpheme, albeit a discontinuous one. As a result, while the form *na* alone was glossed STAT(IVE), I shall gloss the sequence *na...si* as PRF<sub>1</sub>...PRF<sub>2</sub>, with no attempt to arrive at a compositional analysis.<sup>27</sup> As for the semantic process that may have led to the creation of these compound forms, this is a matter of history, which goes beyond the limits of the present study.

Considered from a purely semantic angle, the two TAM categories under consideration are synonymous, as they both correspond to the typological definition

of the PERFECT aspect. They represent a realis event insofar as it is complete, and place the cursor in the resultant state that follows that event.

(75a) LTG Kemēm **na** gil o **si** ne keka tekēle.  
 1EXCL:PL PRF<sub>1</sub> dig out PRF<sub>2</sub> ART yam some  
 ‘We have dug out a few yams.’

(75b) LTG Ne keka tekēle kemēm **ve** gil o **si**.  
 ART yam some 1EXCL:PL BkPF<sub>1</sub> dig out BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘(These are) a few yams we have dug out.’

Because they both point to the resultant state that follows the final boundary of a completed state of affairs, they are equally compatible with stative and with dynamic predicates. This comes in contrast with the Stative and the Imperfective, which tend to combine with distinct sets of verbs – stative vs. dynamic – as we saw earlier (§4.1.1). Thus, while the dynamic verb *gil o* ‘dig out’ is incompatible with the Stative *na* (→ \**na gil o*), it can perfectly take the standard Perfect which is derived from it (→ *na gil o si*).<sup>28</sup>

Yet, even though the two perfects may be said to be synonymous in terms of their aspectual semantics, they are not functionally equivalent, and in fact occur in distinct contexts. The difference between these two TAM categories is best defined in pragmatic terms, by contrasting the manner they organize the informational hierarchy within the sentence: to use the terms of Lambrecht (1994:52), the standard Perfect puts its predicate under the scope of the *assertion*, whereas the Background Perfect encodes explicitly its status as a *pragmatic presupposition* (Table 4). This use of TAM markers for the coding of informational hierarchy is typologically original.

**Table 4** – *Hiw and Lo-Toga have two Perfects; their difference lies in the pragmatic status of the predicate*

|                    | HIW                        | LO-TOGA                 | PRAGMATIC STATUS OF PREDICATE |
|--------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (Standard) Perfect | ( <i>ně</i> )... <i>ti</i> | <i>na</i> ... <i>si</i> | asserted / foregrounded       |
| Background Perfect | ( <i>ve</i> )... <i>ti</i> | <i>ve</i> ... <i>si</i> | presupposed / backgrounded    |

#### 4.1.3 When TAM markers encode informational hierarchy

The regular Perfect (Hiw *ně...ti*, LTG *na...si*) represents the predicate as a realis perfect event *and* it places it under the scope of the sentence's informational focus. This is the pragmatically unmarked situation, the one where the syntactic center of the sentence coincides with its pragmatic center in terms of assertion – as in (75a) or (76a):

(76a) Hiw Ike ttöm tom ne tiṛ mon, pa tego. **Ně** řak **ti**.  
 2SG think COMP ART true bird but NEG:EXIST PRF<sub>1</sub> make PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘You could think it's a real bird, but far from it. (Somebody) made it.’

As for the Background Perfect (Hiw *ve...ti*, LTG *ve...si*), it also construes a realis perfect predicate, but explicitly specifies its informational status as pragmatically

presupposed, i.e. defocused. Crucially, a predicate phrase marked with the Background Perfect (henceforth “BkPf”), due to this backgrounded status, cannot constitute a well-formed utterance on its own:

- (76b) Hiw \***Ve**    *ṛak*    **ti**.  
           BkPf<sub>1</sub>    make    BkPf<sub>2</sub>  
           \*{(somebody) made it... }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>

In contrast with (76a) *ně ṛak ti*, a sentence like (76b) would be felt incomplete. This is because an utterance, in order to be pragmatically valid, needs to contain at least some new, assertional information.<sup>29</sup> Insofar as the BkPf tags a predicate phrase as presupposed, it makes it unable to constitute a correct utterance by itself; in order to be interpretable, the sentence will need some other constituents in which the pragmatic assertion can be identified.

Occasionally, the background status applies to the whole clause (i.e. the predicate with its arguments and complements), which is then entirely marked as presupposed. This is what happens, for example, when the speaker refers back to an event that is already known to the addressee, as a reminder. Thus compare the regular Perfect of (77a), where the whole clause is fully new, and the Background Perfect of (77b), where it only serves as a reminder of an already known fact:

- (77a) LTG    Sesē            **na**    *hag*    **si** !  
           your.sister    PRF<sub>1</sub>    sit       PRF<sub>2</sub>  
           ‘Hey! { Your sister has given birth! }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub>’

- (77b) LTG    Sesē            **ve**    *hag*    **si** :    ne    teñwèn    hitē    ne    leqëvine?  
           your.sister    BkPf<sub>1</sub>    sit       BkPf<sub>2</sub>    ART    male       or       ART    female  
           ‘{ Your sister has given birth (as we know): }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>  
           { is it a boy or a girl? }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub>’

(77b) could be described as a case of clause topicalization.<sup>30</sup> The event marked as Background Perfect has no informational value in itself, that would allow it to form an utterance of its own; rather, it is used as a reminder to help the addressee interpret the focal part of the sentence (in this instance, the question).

#### 4.1.4 How many clauses?

As is typically the case for topic–focus structures, the syntactic relationship between the two clauses in (77b) is still loose. While it does illustrate a form of dependency, it does not form subordination in the strict sense of the term. Most of the time, however, the Background Perfect is involved in much more tightly bound structures than this. As we shall see in §4.2, the presupposed predicate quite often involves genuine subordination, e.g. a relative clause:

- (78) LTG    Lōwie    ē    leqëvine    meke    {nie    **ve**    rak    **si**    ne    tōtōgalē }.  
           thanks    OBL    woman    your    3SG    BkPf<sub>1</sub>    make    BkPf<sub>2</sub>    ART    picture  
           ‘Thanks to your wife { (who) drew the pictures }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>.’

One ambiguous case, however, is when the sentence apparently consists of a single

predicate: this happens especially in contrastive focus sentences like (79).

(79) Hiw NOKE **ve** tot **ti.**  
 1SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> carve BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 'I carved it!' (not you...)

The predicate here (*ve tot ti*) is the presupposed segment of the sentence, whereas the focal part corresponds to its grammatical subject (*noke*). In fact the sentence's structure looks very much parallel to its English counterpart, including the contrastive focal stress that hits the subject phrase, with the same pragmatic implications. All these arguments tend to suggest that (79), just like its English translation, consists of just one syntactic clause, with no possibility to speak here of clause dependency. If that were true, then we would need to temper the claim that the pragmatic mechanism of the Background Perfect almost systematically goes along with subordination. In doing so, one would have to admit that the pragmatic properties of the BkPf sometimes trigger clause dependency as in (78), but sometimes operate on a purely pragmatic level, with little incidence on the syntactic structures, like in (79). This would also challenge the statement made earlier – about (76b) – that a main clause cannot stand alone if it is marked with the Background Perfect.

In fact, we will see below (§4.2.2.2) that the structural similarity between Lo-Toga and English in (79) is an optical illusion. It will appear that (79), just like all contrastive focus patterns in the Torres languages, is best analyzed as consisting of not just one, but two distinct clauses. In doing so, I will show that the Background Perfect does not only affect the pragmatic interpretation of the sentence in terms of informational hierarchy, but also has a syntactic impact, in creating a genuine relation of subordination between predicates.

#### 4.2 From pragmatic presupposition to syntactic subordination

The following pages will illustrate in more detail this syntactic affinity of the Background Perfect with clause dependency. I will first show cases where the two perfects combine with overt subordinators (§4.2.1). I will then show that the BkPf alone may in fact suffice to generate clause dependency and subordination, without requiring any other formal device (§4.2.2). The special syntax of contrastive focus structures will be examined in §4.2.2.2.

##### 4.2.1 The two perfects and overtly marked subordination

The semantic principles exposed in §4.1.3 for main clauses are equally true for those clauses which are formally marked as dependent by means of an overt subordinator. Thus, the regular Perfect will be used whenever the subordinate clause falls under the scope of the assertion. This is the case, in general, for complement clauses attached to verbs of speech or thought:

- (80) LTG Nēke dōem { **ṭĕ** ne n̄wiē **na** kur nike pe **t'** }.  
 1SG think COMP ART Ogre PRF<sub>1</sub> crunch 2SG already PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 'I thought (that) the Ogre had already devoured you.'

Regular Perfects are also found in the protasis of certain conditional clauses:

- (81) LTG { **ṬEWĒṬĒ** ne temēt **na** ōla nike **si** },  
 if ART ghost PRF<sub>1</sub> take:TR 2SG PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 Temētrōn tē n' ake vēn hēr ē nike Pene.  
 Healer FUT<sub>1</sub> 3SG FUT<sub>2</sub> go find OBL 2SG Hell  
 'If the ghosts *kidnapped* you, the Healer would come and find you in Hell.'

Conversely, if a subordinate clause refers back to an already established event, then the Background Perfect will be required. This is especially true of restrictive relative clauses, whose function is precisely to point to a background element to help the addressee track referents:

- (82) LTG ne revrev **pe** nēke **ve** hur **si** / (?? pe nēke na hur si)  
 ART song REL 1SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> sing BkPF<sub>2</sub> REL 1SG PRF<sub>1</sub> sing PRF<sub>2</sub>  
 'the song { which I sang }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>'
- (83) LTG Ne lilie { **pe** nie **ve** durlue **si** } ve taqe wahe me deñwē'k.  
 ART cave REL 3SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> drill BkPF<sub>2</sub> IPFV lie until hither today  
 'The cave { which he broke open }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub> still exists today.'

In each of these two sentences, the relative clause is unambiguously marked as subordinate by its relativiser *pe* (§2.2.3). As for the BkPf, it arguably operates on the pragmatic level, by providing its predicate with a background status.

The regular (assertive) Perfect is thus extremely rare in relative clauses. This configuration does occur however, in exceptional cases, when the informational focus is in fact located within the relative clause. Example (84) provides an illustration of this non-standard situation:

- (84) LTG Heñwere pah tat lōlmerēn ē.  
 people all NEG:IRR know OBL:ADV  
 Heñwere { **wē** **na** huqe wereño **si** } nihe ve lōlmerēn ē.  
 people REL PRF<sub>1</sub> initiated only PRF<sub>2</sub> 3PL IPFV know OBL:ADV  
 'Not everybody would know (these things).  
 Only { those who've been initiated }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> know<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>.'

What forms syntactically the main clause (*nihe ve lōlmerēn*) of the whole sentence is functionally a mere repetition of the previous sentence, with no informational weight. Conversely, the sentence's assertion is located in the relative clause, which exceptionally takes the regular Perfect rather than the Background Perfect.

A sentence such as (84) tends to show that the conditions of use of the two perfects in relative clauses do not obey a strict formal rule, whereby all relative clauses would mechanically take the Background Perfect. Rather, the choice of TAM marker remains a functionally productive device, based on the informational hierarchy chosen by the speaker in organizing his utterance.



#### 4.2.2 The subordinating effect of the Background Perfect alone

In sum, it would be exaggerated to say that all relative clauses – let alone all subordinate clauses – require the Background Perfect: this is only the case for those clauses which are pragmatically presupposed. Now, if we narrow down our observations to the latter configuration, an important point remains to be made. Unlike all other realis markers, the Background Perfect allows a subordinate clause to dispense with any formal subordinator, as though it were sufficient *per se* to code for clause dependency. This, as we shall see now, is especially the case with relative clauses, and focus cleft constructions which are derived from them.

##### 4.2.2.1 Relative clauses

While the BkPf is occasionally found to combine with an overt relativizer – see (82)–(83) – the most frequent pattern is for perfect relative clauses to lack any formal subordinator, and be simply marked by the BkPf alone (see also (78) above).

- (85) LTG li megage { **ve** pah si }  
 LOC month BkPF<sub>1</sub> finish BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘last month’ [lit. in the month { (which) has finished }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub> ]
- (86) HIW Ike peon sawe-vog ne temët { tekñwa ain **ve** řak ti }.  
 2SG FUT dance-APPL ART headdress people other BkPF<sub>1</sub> make BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘You shall dance with a headdress { other people will have made }<sub>[BKG]</sub>.’

A superficial look at (86) could suggest a comparison with the syntax of zero-marked relative clauses in English, which happens to be parallel here. Two differences must however be noted.

- Contrary to English, zero-marked relative clauses in Torres languages are allowed whatever the function of the antecedent within the subordinate clause. Thus while English allows a zero-marked clause in (86) where the relativized NP is an object, it does not in (85), where it is a subject. The Torres languages are less constrained than English in this regard.
- Contrary to English, zero-marked relativization in the Torres languages is only allowed in combination with certain specific TAM markers, the Background Perfect and the Subjunctive. The Torres languages are more constrained than English in this regard.

We can now account for example (2), which was quoted in §1.2:

- (2) LTG Ne gehuh { **ve** kerkur tēle si } mat mēt.  
 ART coconut.crab BkPF<sub>1</sub> ITER~crunch person BkPF<sub>2</sub> CPLT die  
 [lit. The coconut crab { has devoured people }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub> { has died }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub>]  
 ‘The coconut crab (who) was devouring people had died.’

On the face of it, (2) is a sequence of two clauses taking the same subject, with no formal marker of dependency between the two clauses. Only the nature of the Background Perfect, and its ability to defocus its own predicate, makes it clear here which clause is subordinate, and which is the main clause of the sentence. It must also be noted that – setting aside the case of the Subjunctive (§3.5.2) – only the BkPf is capable of encoding a relative clause in this way. Even the Imperfective, which is otherwise morphologically similar to the BkPf, makes the presence of an overt

relativizer obligatory: compare this sentence (2) with its counterpart (16).

This analysis in turn helps us understand the structure of (75b), here repeated:

- (75b) LTG Ne keka tekēle kemēm ve gil o si.  
 ART yam some 1EXCL:PL BkPF<sub>1</sub> dig out BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 ‘(These are) a few yams we have dug out.’

An initial approach could have proposed to analyse (75b) as consisting of a single clause, with a single predicate (*ve gil o si*). In this case, the unusual sentence-initial position of the object noun phrase (*ne keka tekēle*) would probably be explained as a form of left-dislocation. However, this analysis does not hold, for two reasons: formally, the whole sentence is uttered under a single phrase contour with no pause, which makes it incompatible with a topic-focus pattern; and semantically, the function of the initial NP is not that of a topic (*\*These yams...*), but of a predicate (*These are some yams...*). This sentence can only be properly analyzed if one remembers that the Torres languages do not make use of any copula for noun predicates, i.e. nouns and noun phrases are directly predicative [see §2.1.3, ex.(6)]. Consequently, an appropriate syntactic analysis for (75b) would posit not one clause, but two: first, the whole sentence consists of a zero subject followed by its NP predicate: [*These are*] {a few yams we have dug out}; second, the clause *we have dug out* constitutes a relative clause (marked by the BkPf) that is embedded within that main predicate phrase.

Relative clauses marked by the BkPf alone have all the syntactic properties of relative clauses in these languages. They can be embedded within a noun phrase, a prepositional phrase, etc. As mentioned above, the antecedent of the relative can play any syntactic role both in the main clause and in the relative clause itself; and it may also be referred to by a resumptive, anaphoric morpheme within the relative clause (e.g. *ē* ‘there, from it’):

- (87) LTG Ne gerite ni n̄wule wulē vete {hōr v' ōla t' ē}.  
 ART octopus AOR:3SG return again place 3DU BkPF<sub>1</sub> take:TR BkPF<sub>2</sub> OBL:ADV  
 ‘The octopus went back to the place {they had caught it from}.’

The use of the BkPf in relative clauses is so widespread, that one often hears quite complex sentences such as (88), which superficially consist in a string of juxtaposed clauses, with no obvious indication of their syntactic structure.

- (88) LTG MOWE nie ve velag wahe vin, ni v̄en wahe v̄en li lilie  
 time 3SG IPFV run until up AOR:3SG go until thither LOC cave  
 {nihe ve toge si viēne}, {remē mē v' in si viēne},  
 3PL BkPF<sub>1</sub> stay BkPF<sub>2</sub> underneath mother his BkPF<sub>1</sub> lie BkPF<sub>2</sub> underneath  
 {ne n̄wiē ve liē nie t' ē}, nie ni gerage.  
 ART devil BkPF<sub>1</sub> replace 3SG BkPF<sub>2</sub> OBL:ADV 3SG AOR:3SG climb  
 ‘And AS he ran all the way up, he managed to reach the cave  
 {(WHERE) they had been staying}, {(WHERE) his mother had been lying},  
 {(AND WHERE) the devil had taken her place}, and he climbed it.’

Apart from the first clause which is here introduced by the noun-conjunction *mowe* ‘time, moment’ (§2.2.4), the five remaining clauses lack any subordinator properly

speaking. However, the status of the three medial clauses (in braces) as restrictive relative clauses is unambiguous: this is indicated by the Background Perfect, as well as by the presence of locative adverbials (*viēne* ‘underneath’, *ē* ‘there’) whose function is to indicate the syntactic role of their antecedent (the noun *lilie* ‘cave’) within each embedded clause. Ultimately, among the six clauses in (88), only two have the status of informatively new, syntactically main clauses: these are the two Aorist clauses *ni vēn wahe* ‘he reached’ and *ni gerage* ‘he climbed’.

#### 4.2.2.2 Focusing structures

##### 4.2.2.2.1 Contrastive focus of the subject

The coding of contrastive focus, in the Torres languages as much as in other languages of north Vanuatu, resorts to a cleft-sentence strategy which is derived from its relativization patterns. The focal constituent, generally a noun phrase, occurs preferably to the left of the sentence – whether via left-dislocation or not – and is immediately followed by a relative clause pointing to the presupposed segment of the utterance.

- (89) HIW TEKNWA TAMESŌ { **PE** **ve** *vegevage vati kema ti ie* }.  
 people old REL BkPF<sub>1</sub> talk show 1EXCL:PL BkPF<sub>2</sub> OBL:ADV  
 ‘(It is) the elder generation { WHO taught all these stories to us }.’

Clearly, the best way to analyse (89) would identify two distinct predicates here, in a way similar to the analysis of (75b) above. The predicate phrase *vegevage vati* – itself a verb serialization, see (26) – is marked as syntactically dependent by the Background Perfect, as much as by the relativizer *pe*. It is subordinate to the main predicate of the sentence – that is, the nominal predicate *tekñwa tamesō* ‘(it is) the elders’.

The syntactic organization of such structures is also reflected in their prosody. A sentence like (89) is uttered with a contrastive accent on the last stressed syllable of the group *tekñwa tamesō*. It is followed by a distinctive fall in pitch and intensity on the remainder of the sentence, which is typical of presupposed elements in cleft-constructions:

[təkɲ<sup>w</sup>a ,tamə<sup>so</sup> ↓<sub>pə βə βəγəβəγə βati kəma ti 'ia</sub>]

The analysis of (89) may also apply to a slightly different form of focusing pattern, one that lacks any formal relativizer. Consider (90):

- (90) HIW TEKNWA TE TOGE **ve** *řak ne gengon ti*.  
 people from Toga BkPF<sub>1</sub> make ART meal BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 [lit. THE TOGA PEOPLE<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> { made the feast }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>]  
 ‘(It was) the Toga people (who) organized the feast.’

A first glance at a sentence like (90), which consists of a sequence NP+VP, might have suggested we are simply dealing with the syntax of a single sentence, with a subject followed by its predicate. However, following the reasoning above for (89), this sentence (90) can rather be shown to consist of two syntactically hierarchized clauses.

The predicate phrase *ve... ti*, which is pragmatically presupposed in the context, would thus be a relative clause with no relativizer, as in (75b) above. The phrase *tekñwa te Toge*, to which this relative clause attaches, is pragmatically the focus of the sentence, and syntactically its matrix (NP) predicate. In other words, the syntactic structure of a focusing sentence like (90) is once again parallel to the NP predicate (75b) above:

- (91)                    NOUN PHRASE                    +                    VERB PHRASE with BKPF  
                           = { nominal equational clause<sub>1</sub>                    +                    relative clause<sub>2</sub> (without relativizer) }

The difference between the simple relative clause of (75b) and the focusing structure (90) lies essentially in the prosody. Thus, (90) contrasts a stressed segment with an unstressed one, just like (89) above:

[tək,ŋ<sup>w</sup>a tə 'təyǝ ↓<sub>βə</sub> Lak nə yən'yon ti]

4.2.2.2 *Biclausality and the negation test*

The biclausal analysis under (91) is confirmed by certain syntactic tests, such as the negation.

In principle, the negator is a member of the TAM paradigm (§2.1.2), which means that it normally occurs in the same slot as the corresponding affirmative TAM marker, on the initial boundary of the negated predicate phrase. For example, a standard Perfect like (92a) would be negated as (92b):

- (92a) Hiw    Tekñwa    te    Toge    **ně**    řak    ne    gengon    **ti**.  
                   people    from    Toga    PRF<sub>1</sub>    make    ART    meal    PRF<sub>2</sub>  
                   'The Toga people organized a feast.'

- (92b) Hiw    Tekñwa    te    Toge    **tati**    řak    ne    gengon.  
                   people    from    Toga    NEG:REAL    make    ART    meal  
                   [ordinary negation, no contrastive focus]  
                   'The Toga people didn't organize a feast.'

→ 1 CLAUSE

But the sentence's overall structure turns out to be different when the negation affects a Background Perfect sentence such as (90). Instead of combining with the verb *řak* as in (92b), the negator then affects the initial noun phrase of the sentence, thereby proving it has the syntactic status of a predicate:

- (93) Hiw    **Tati**    tekñwa    te    Toge    **ve**    řak    ne    gengon    **ti**.  
                   NEG:REAL    people    from    Toga    BKPF<sub>1</sub>    make    ART    meal    BKPF<sub>2</sub>  
                   [negation of contrastive focus pattern]  
                   '{ It's NOT the Toga people }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> (who) organized the feast<sub>[BKG]</sub>.'

→ 2 CLAUSES

In sum, (90) consists not just of a subject phrase with its predicate, but of two predicates: it must be analyzed as a genuine cleft construction.

Finally, exactly the same analysis could be conducted to account for example (79), mentioned in §4.1.4 and repeated below:

- (79) Hiw NOKE **ve** tot **ti**.  
 1SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> carve BkPF<sub>2</sub>  
 [lit. '{(it's) I }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> (who) { carved it }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>']  
 'I made it!'

While the shortness and simplicity of (79) would spontaneously suggest we're dealing with a monoclausal SV(O) sentence just like its English translation, it turns out that a more accurate analysis would have to parse it into two distinct clauses: a direct noun predicate (*noke*)<sup>31</sup> followed by a relative clause with no relativizer (*ve tot ti*).<sup>32</sup> Thus the negation of (79) would be parallel to (93) above:

- (79') Hiw **Tati** noke **ve** tot **ti**. Temo-k.  
 NEG:REAL 1SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> carve BkPF<sub>2</sub> father-1SG  
 '{(It's) not I }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> { (who) carved it }<sub>[BKG]</sub>. (It's) my father.'

#### 4.2.2.2.3 Contrastive focus of non-subjects

The analysis just proposed for the contrastive focus of subject noun phrases can be extended to other syntactic functions, and other parts of speech. Indeed, we know (from §2.1.3) that the ability to constitute a direct predicate – with no copula – is not only characteristic of nouns and noun phrases, but in fact of most other parts of speech and syntactic constituents.

It is thus possible to interpret all focus constructions as BICLAUSAL sentences, along the lines of (91). The focus phrase forming a direct predicate may be, for example, an adverb (94) or a predicative demonstrative (95):

- (94) Hiw **Ve** *ṛak* **ti** NŴĒNA?  
 BkPF<sub>1</sub> make BkPF<sub>2</sub> how  
 [lit. { made it }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub> HOW<sub>[FOCUS]</sub>?]  
 'How was it made?'

- (95) LTG *Noke* **ve** *vēn* **ve** *tun* **si** Vave PE NŌK!  
 1SG BkPF<sub>1</sub> go BkPF<sub>1</sub> buy BkPF<sub>2</sub> Vava FOC this  
 [lit. { I went to buy on Vava }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub> { (it's) THIS }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub>]  
 'THIS is what I bought on Vava island.'

In those cases too, the BkPf clause can be analyzed as a relative clause followed by its matrix predicate.

The case for this biclausal analysis is even stronger when the asserted phrase is fronted, as commonly happens in cleft focus constructions. As mentioned in §2.1.1, the order of constituents is normally SVO. As long as the asserted element coincided with the subject of the backgrounded verb, as in (90) or (79) above, the focus construction involved no displacing of the phrase under focus; its pragmatic status was only indicated by the prosody (and of course, indirectly, by the BkPf in the rest of the sentence). But when fronting affects an object or another complement whose normal position is after the predicate, then the disrupted syntax of the sentence makes it clear that we are dealing with a biclausal structure.

For example, compare the non-contrastive sentence (96a) – with standard word

order and the regular Perfect – and its contrastive counterpart (96b):

- (96a) LTG Gide **na** v̄en **si** me ē ne mesale pek.  
 1INCL:PL PRF<sub>1</sub> go PRF<sub>2</sub> hither OBL:PREP ART road this  
 ‘We came through this road.’  
 → 1 CLAUSE
- (96b) LTG NE MESALE PEK gide **ve** v̄en **si** me ē.  
 ART road this 1INCL:PL BkPF<sub>1</sub> go BkPF<sub>2</sub> hither OBL:ADV  
 [lit. ‘(it is) THIS ROAD (that) we came through (it).’]  
 ‘THIS is the road we came through.’  
 → 2 CLAUSES

(96b) shows fronting of the focal element, in the form of a predicate noun phrase (*ne mesale pek* ‘[it is] this road’). The remainder of the sentence, which is marked as BkPF, has the syntactic status of a relative clause. Specifically, the antecedent *mesale* ‘road’ is anaphorically indexed by the locative preposition-adverb *ē* (‘there, through it’) – in accordance with the typical syntax of relative clauses, as in (87) above. The resulting double-zero relative clause – i.e. zero relativizer, zero anaphora on the preposition – happens to be structurally close to its English equivalent: *(it is) THIS ROAD {∅ we came through ∅}*.

We had seen earlier that the surface form of subject-focusing sentences like (79) showed some form of structural ambiguity, to the point that certain tests were required to determine their underlying syntax (§4.2.2.2.2). This is not necessary any more with these other contrastive focus cleft constructions such as (96b), because they are transparent in this regard.

In sum, a predicate marked as Background Perfect must always be understood as forming a subordinate clause – even when superficially it may seem to form the sole verb of the utterance. The pragmatic center of assertion, as much as the syntactic center of the sentence, will have to be sought outside of its boundaries.

#### 4.2.2.3 Wh-questions and the Background Perfect

Finally, a contrast similar to (96a-b) can be found in the structure of questions. At first sight, the different choice of aspect between (97a) and (97b) is difficult to explain:

- (97a) LTG Nike **na** vegevage **si** mi paie? → (??**ve** vegevage si...)  
 2SG PRF<sub>1</sub> talk PRF<sub>2</sub> with who  
 [lit. You were talking to whom?]  
 ‘Who were you talking to?’  
 [STANDARD PERFECT]
- (97b) LTG Paie **ve** vegevage **si** mē-ke? → (**\*na** vegevage si...)  
 who BkPF<sub>1</sub> talk BkPF<sub>2</sub> with-you  
 ‘Who was talking to you?’  
 [BACKGROUND PERFECT]

The rule that is empirically observed, and illustrated by (97a-b), is given in (98):

- (98) In content questions referring to a completed event (perfect), the verb will normally take the REGULAR PERFECT if the question word comes after the verb; but it must be marked as BACKGROUND PERFECT if the question word precedes the verb (whether by *wh*-movement or not).

The explanation for this unexpected asymmetry has to do with the placement of the sentential focus, which in content questions systematically hits – or includes – the question word. In (97a), which is unmarked for word order, the sentence-final position of the question word *paie* is compatible with the interpretation of the whole predicate (including its complement) as falling under the pragmatic focus of the utterance. In (97b) however, the sentence-initial position of *paie* attracts stress and sentential focus, yielding a sentence shape that is strongly reminiscent of focalising structures such as (79) or (96b). A consequence of this sentence-initial focus is that the rest of the sentence has to be coded as informationally defocused, which explains the use of the Background Perfect here. Once again, the most appropriate analysis of (97b) is to consider it as biclausal, in a way similar to (91) above. In other words, what we have here is literally:

- (97b) ‘{ (it is) WHO }<sub>[FOCUS]</sub> (the one that) { was talking to you }<sub>[BACKGROUND]</sub>?’

Such a formal TAM contrast between (97a-b), depending on the placement of the question word, is unique to the Torres languages, and unknown elsewhere in the region. Furthermore, it is even quite particular within these two languages, as it is restricted to those questions whose verbal aspect is a perfect. Uncommon though it may be, this contrast can however be explained by the internal logics of these languages, in terms of the handling of informational hierarchy and predicate dependencies.

#### 4.3 The Background Perfect: summary

The various patterns characteristic of the Background Perfect are summarized in Table 5.

**Table 5** – The narrow links of the Background Perfect with clause dependency: A summary

| SYNTAX                            | FUNCTIONAL VALUE   | EXAMPLES                         |
|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
| no subordination                  | clause topicalization & backgrounding  | (77b)                            |
| combines<br>with subordinators    | realis background (restrictive) relative clauses<br>realis background clause in cleft focus patterns   | (82)-(83)<br>(89)                |
| directly encodes<br>subordination | realis background (restrictive) relative clauses<br>realis background clause in cleft focus patterns<br>⇒ question sentences if <i>wh</i> -word is fronted | (85)-(88)<br>(90)-(96b)<br>(97b) |

## 5 Conclusion

Hiw and Lo-Toga, the two languages of the Torres islands, possess a wealth of formal devices for the encoding of clause dependency, and make regular use of them with most of their TAM markers. However, we have seen that two TAM categories – the Subjunctive and the Background Perfect – present a different behaviour when it comes to the handling of interclausal relations. While they are both compatible with regular subordinators, they also show a marked tendency to do without them, and to be used alone as a subordinating strategy in its own right.

Obviously, the two cases under study differ in many respects, if only because they do not affect the same discourse constraints:

- the Subjunctive contrasts with other irrealis markers, in lacking the necessary information about the clause's MODALITY STATUS and ILLOCUTIONARY FORCE.
- the Background Perfect contrasts with other realis categories (especially with the regular Perfect), in marking its target predicate as PRAGMATICALLY PRESUPPOSED.

One characteristic that is nevertheless shared by these two components is that they both affect the pragmatic well-formedness of an utterance. A sentence, if irrealis, needs to have some form of illocutionary force; and likewise, an utterance must include at least some new, asserted segment. In my interpretation, the absence of either of these two elements in a clause is precisely what makes it unable to form a sentence on its own, and makes it dependent, both functionally and syntactically, upon external predicates and clauses.

In sum, different as they may be, these two patterns follow essentially the same underlying mechanism, which justifies their comparison. In both cases, the key to the syntactic structures attested is a form of pragmatic indeterminacy, or **PRAGMATIC DEMOTION**, that is inherently conveyed by the TAM marker.

The two patterns illustrated in this paper are specific to Hiw and Lo-Toga, and make these two languages original, even in comparison with the nearby languages of north Vanuatu. Yet they also show some form of universal relevance. They remind us that the existence of formal, dedicated subordinators is not the sole key to the syntax of interclausal relations; and that patterns of clause dependency can also result, albeit indirectly, from a clause's pragmatic properties and semantic profile. This is another illustration of how the formal structures of languages are regularly shaped up and renovated by the functional constraints that weigh upon communication.

## Abbreviations

Examples are glossed according to the Leipzig rules. More specific abbreviations are listed below.

|      |             |      |                    |      |                 |
|------|-------------|------|--------------------|------|-----------------|
| AFF  | affirmative | ART  | article            | COMP | complementizer  |
| AOR  | Aorist      | BKPF | Background Perfect | CPLT | Complete aspect |
| APPL | applicative | CAUS | causative          | CTFC | Counterfactual  |



|      |                 |           |                      |        |                 |
|------|-----------------|-----------|----------------------|--------|-----------------|
| DU   | dual            | LTG       | Lo-Toga              | PROSP  | Prospective     |
| FOC  | focus marker    | M         | masculine            | QUOT   | quotative       |
| FUT  | Future          | NEG:EXIST | Negative existential | REL    | relativizer     |
| IPFV | Imperfective    | OBL       | oblique              | RESULT | resultative     |
| IRR  | irrealis        | POC       | Proto Oceanic        | S      | subject clitic  |
| ITER | iterative       | POSS      | possessive marker    | SBJV   | Subjunctive     |
| HIW  | Hiw             | POT       | Potential            | STAT   | Stative         |
| LOC  | locative marker | PRF       | Perfect              | TR     | transitive verb |

## References

- Aikhenvald, A. 2005. Serial verb constructions in a typological perspective. In R.M.W. Dixon & A. Aikhenvald (eds), *Serial Verb Constructions: A cross-linguistic typology*. Explorations in Linguistic Typology. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp. 1-87.
- Bril, I. 2004. Complex nuclei in Oceanic languages: contribution to an areal typology. In I. Brill & F. Ozanne-Rivierre (eds), pp. 1-48.
- Bril, I. & Ozanne-Rivierre, F. (eds). 2004. *Complex predicates in Oceanic languages: Studies in the dynamics of binding and boundedness*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Bybee, J.; Perkins, R. & Pagliuca, W. 1994. *The Evolution of Grammar: Tense, Aspect, and Modality in the Languages of the World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Chappell, H. 2008. Variation in the grammaticalization of complementizers from *verba dicendi* in Sinitic languages. *Linguistic Typology* 12-1: 45-98.
- Comrie, B. 1976. *Aspect. An introduction to the study of verbal aspects and related problems*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cristofaro, S. 1998. Deranking and Balancing in different Subordination Relations: a Typological Study. *Sprachtypologie und Universalienforschung* 51: 3-42.
- 2003. *Subordination*. Studies in Typology and Linguistic Theory. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2008. Purpose Clauses. In M. Haspelmath *et al.* (eds), chapter 125.
- Crowley, T. 1987. Serial verbs in Paamese. *Studies in Language* 11: 35-84.
- 2002. *Serial Verbs in Oceanic: A Descriptive Typology*. Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- 2004. *Bislama Reference Grammar*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- Dik, S. 1989. *The Theory of Functional Grammar. Part 1: The Structure of the Clause*, Functional Grammar Series n° 9, Foris, Dordrecht.
- Durie, M. 1997. Grammatical structures in verb serialization. In A. Alsina, J. Bresnan & P. Sells (eds), *Complex predicates*. Stanford: CSLI publications. Pp.289-354.
- Ernout, A. & Thomas, F. 1953 [1993]. *Syntaxe latine*. Paris: Klincksieck.
- Evans, N. 2007. Insubordination and its uses. In I. Nikolaeva (ed.) *Finiteness. Theoretical and empirical foundations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp.366-431.
- Foley, W. & Olson, M. 1985. Clausehood and verb serialization. In J. Nichols & A.C. Woodbury (eds), *Grammar inside and outside the clause. Some approaches to theory from the field*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.17-60.
- François, A. 1997. La subordination sans marques segmentales: Formes de dépendance interpropositionnelle dans le discours. Mémoire de DEA (Masters thesis). Paris: Université Paris-III Sorbonne Nouvelle. 174 pp.
- 2003. *La sémantique du prédicat en mwotlap (Vanuatu)*. Collection Linguistique de la Société de Linguistique de Paris, 84. Paris, Louvain: Peeters.
- 2004. Chains of freedom: Constraints and creativity in the macro-verb strategies of Mwotlap. In I. Brill & F. Ozanne-Rivierre (eds), pp.107-143.

- 2005a. Diversité des prédicats non verbaux dans quelques langues océaniques. In J. François & I. Behr (eds), *Les constituants prédicatifs et la diversité des langues: Actes de la Journée de la Société de Linguistique de Paris*. Mémoires de la Société de Linguistique de Paris. Louvain: Peeters. Pp.179-197.
- 2005b. Unraveling the history of the vowels of seventeen northern Vanuatu languages. *Oceanic Linguistics* 44-2: 443-504.
- 2006. Serial verb constructions in Mwotlap. In R.M.W. Dixon & A. Aikhenvald (eds), *Serial Verb Constructions: A cross-linguistic typology*. Explorations in Linguistic Typology. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Pp.223-238.
- in press. Verbal aspect and personal pronouns: The history of aorist markers in north Vanuatu. In A. Pawley & S. Adelaar (eds), *A Festschrift for Robert Blust*. Pacific Linguistics. Canberra: Australian National University.
- in prep. From deictics to clause linkers. Discourse deixis, topicalization and clause backgrounding strategies in the languages of the Banks islands (Vanuatu). 37 pp.
- Givón, T. 1984/1990. *Syntax. A functional-typological introduction*. Amsterdam Philadelphia: Benjamins.
- Haspelmath, M. 2007. Pre-established categories don't exist—consequences for language description and typology. *Linguistic Typology* 11-1: 119-132.
- Haspelmath, M.; Dryer, M.; Gil, D. & Comrie, B. (eds). 2008. *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Munich: Max Planck Digital Library. [<http://wals.info/>]
- Heath, J. 1985. Discourse in the field: clause structure in Ngandi. In J. Nichols & A.C. Woodbury (eds), *Grammar inside and outside the clause: some approaches to theory from the field*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp.89-110.
- Heine, B. & Kuteva, Tania. 2002. *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lambrecht, K. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form: Topic, focus, and the mental representation of discourse referents*. Cambridge Studies in Linguistics 71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Launey, M. 1994. *Une grammaire omniprédicative: Essai sur la morphosyntaxe du nahuatl classique*. Sciences du Langage. Paris: CNRS.
- Lemaréchal, A. 1989. *Les parties du discours. Syntaxe et sémantique*. Linguistique Nouvelle. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- 1992. Extension possible de la notion d'orientation aux subordonnées complétives et leurs équivalents. *Bulletin de la Société de Linguistique de Paris* 87 (1): 1-35.
- Mühlhäusler, P.; Dutton, T.E. & Romaine, S. 2003. *Tok Pisin Texts: From the beginning to the present*. New York, Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Noonan, M. 1985. Complementation. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), 42-140.
- Shopen, T. (ed.) 1985. *Language Typology and Syntactic Description*, vol.2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Stassen, L. 2000. AND-Languages and WITH-Languages. *Linguistic Typology* 4: 1-54.
- Thompson, S. & Longacre, R. 1985. Adverbial clauses. In Timothy Shopen (ed.), 169-234.
- Tomlin, R. 1985. Foreground-background information and the syntax of subordination. *Text* 5, 85-122.
- van der Auwera, J. & Plungian, V. 1998. Modality's semantic map. *Linguistic Typology* 2: 79-124.
- van der Auwera, J.; Dobrushina, N. & Goussev, V. 2008. Imperative-Hortative Systems. In M. Haspelmath et al. (eds), chapter 72. [<http://wals.info/feature/description/72>. Retrieved 2008-11-15.]

---

<sup>1</sup> The present work originates in a talk I gave in 2006 in the research group *Typology of interclausal dependencies* (Fédération Typologie et Universaux Linguistiques), led by Isabelle Brill. I am grateful to her, as well as Alexis Michaud, Claudia Wegener and Johan van der Auwera, for their helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper. The data presented in this chapter were collected by the author during several field trips to the Torres islands, in 2004, 2006 and 2007. The financial support of the LACITO-CNRS, as well as of the French *Ministère de la Recherche* (ACI “Jeunes Chercheurs”), is also gratefully acknowledged.

- <sup>2</sup> When a given fact is unique to one of the two languages, this will be stated explicitly: see for example the resultative construction in §3.6, which exists only in Lo-Toga.
- <sup>3</sup> The spelling conventions adopted for the two Torres languages include the following:  $g = [\gamma]$ ;  $\bar{n} = [\eta]$ ;  $\bar{n}w = [\eta^w]$ ;  $q = [k^w]$ ;  $d = [t]$ ;  $\bar{r} = [ʁ]$ ;  $o = [ɔ]$ ;  $\bar{o} = [o]$ ;  $\bar{o} = [ə]$ ;  $e = [ə]$ ;  $\bar{e} = \text{LTG } [ɛ]$ ,  $\text{HIW } [e]$ ;  $\bar{e} = \text{LTG } [e]$ ,  $\text{HIW } [i]$ .
- <sup>4</sup> Obviously, the category “Subjunctive” of the two Torres languages owes its name to very similar mood categories found in other languages (Noonan 1985:91), notably Indo-European. This being said, as a principle, the observations made in this article must be understood as applying primarily to the TAM category specific of the Torres languages – hence the uppercase in its label, following the usage in Comrie (1976:10). They do not intend to make any general claim about the properties of a universal category *subjunctive* – supposing such a cross-linguistic category indeed exists (see Haspelmath 2007).
- <sup>5</sup> The morphosyntax of the negation will be mentioned in §4.2.2.2.2.
- <sup>6</sup> Many of these TAM morphemes are morphologically complex, and sometimes discontinuous – as in the case of the Perfect *na...si* in (3). See also the discussion in §4.1.2.
- <sup>7</sup> See François (2003) for a detailed semantic analysis of a much similar (and partly cognate) TAM system, that of the neighbouring language Mwotlap.
- <sup>8</sup> The morphology of the Aorist in the Torres languages is complex (François, in press). First, it is coded by a set of preverbal markers that vary in person and number (LTG 1sg *ke*, 2sg *we*, 3sg *ni...*); second, these preverbal markers are generally deleted in presence of a free personal pronoun, in which case the surface form of the Aorist is simply  $\emptyset$  [see ex. (28b)]. In the present article, I will only mention the Aorist in the gloss when it is relevant to the discussion, otherwise the verb will simply be given as unmarked for TAM.
- <sup>9</sup> In examples (5)-(7), the limits of the predicate phrase are indicated by curly brackets.
- <sup>10</sup> This process, whereby the quotative particle has generalised its use to cover the whole functional array of a complementizer, is widespread in the area. The process may be compared to the typologically common process whereby complementisers originate in a verb of speech (see Heine & Kuteva 2002; Chappell 2008).
- <sup>11</sup> Both the morphology and the semantics of the Lo-Toga Prospective are narrowly similar to those of the Prospective in Mwotlap (François 2003: 218-257).
- <sup>12</sup> This pattern, whereby a noun meaning ‘time, moment’ grammaticalizes into a subordinator, is commonplace in the area. Mwotlap does the same with (*vēt*)*mahē* (François 2003:26), as well as Bislama with *taem* < Eng. *time* (Crowley 2004:188).
- <sup>13</sup> The Resultative constructions of Lo-Toga share certain properties with these serial verb constructions, yet they must be analyzed as a different structure: see §3.6.
- <sup>14</sup> Despite the formal difference between LTG *vē* [ $\beta\varepsilon$ ] ~ *vēn* [ $\beta\varepsilon n$ ] and HIW *on* [ $\text{ɔn}$ ], it is in fact likely that the two forms are cognate. According to regular vowel correspondences (François 2005b), they could reflect a proto-form  $*\beta\text{ani}$ , of uncertain origin. A link with Proto Oceanic  $*\text{pani}$  ‘give’ is not implausible, although it raises semantic problems. The connection between *give* and subjunctives does not seem to be widely supported in other languages (see Bybee et al. 1994), and the etymology of English *if* (< OE *ġif*), sometimes mentioned as connected to *giefan* ‘give’, is disputed.
- <sup>15</sup> The pragmatic incompleteness of an English sentence like (30) is confirmed by historical evidence: in English-based Melanesian Pidgins such as Bislama or Tok Pisin, the imperative form *suppose* has grammaticalised into a subordinator *sipos/sapos* meaning ‘if’ (François 1997:22; Mühlhäusler et al. 2003:24; Crowley 2004:189).
- <sup>16</sup> The forms given in this paragraph are for Lo-Toga. Hiw has corresponding markers for all of them, except that it doesn’t distinguish formally between the Future (32a) and the Prospective (32c) – see also §2.2.1.
- <sup>17</sup> See Noonan (1985:54): “Main clause subjunctives tend to be used in modal, hortative, or imperative senses”.
- <sup>18</sup> A similar hypothesis was proposed in François (1997:66) to explain why certain languages encode their imperative with some linguistic structures (noun phrases, infinitives, subjunctive clauses...) which would be ill-formed to constitute a declarative sentence. Despite their morphological variety, these linguistic

structures all share a similar semantic function: the representation of a virtual State of affairs. More recently, Nick Evans has addressed similar issues under the cover term “Insubordination” (Evans 2007).

- <sup>19</sup> This TAM marker corresponds to what Cristofaro (1998, 2003) calls a “deranked” verb form: that is, a form – of which the Italian Subjunctive would be another illustration – “that is structurally different from those used in independent declarative clauses” (Cristofaro 2008).
- <sup>20</sup> A similar pattern of grammaticalisation can be found in some West Germanic languages. Thus in English, the modal auxiliary *should* in sentence-initial position takes up the function of a conditional conjunction: e.g. *SHOULD you be in Paris, call me* (see Van der Auwera & Plungian 1998:98).
- <sup>21</sup> In other words, the part of speech LOCATIVE in these languages is “directly predicative”, but not “TAM-sensitive” (François 2005a: 192).
- <sup>22</sup> Note that the variant *vën* is never attested in these new structures, which in other words, in other words, tends to confirm that the Subjunctive marker has adopted a new grammatical status here.
- <sup>23</sup> This prefix has thus replaced in function the causative prefix \*paka- of Proto Oceanic, which has essentially left no trace in the two Torres languages.
- <sup>24</sup> Besides the widespread form *ve* [βə], Lo-Toga also possesses a rare variant *me* [mə]; likewise, *me...si* constitutes a (rare) variant of its Background Perfect *ve...si*. Incidentally, there is no reason to suspect any etymological connection between the element *ve* [βə] of the Imperfective and the Lo-Toga form of the Subjunctive *vë* [βɛ]: these are two unrelated morphemes.
- <sup>25</sup> Unlike Lo-Toga where the contrast is systematically coded, Hiw is problematic in that it treats the two proclitics – respectively *në* and *ve* – as optional (see Table 4). Quite often, a perfect predicate will be tagged by the postclitic *ti* alone – as in (19) or (39) – blurring the contrast between the two perfects. This is why the present section will mainly cite examples from Lo-Toga, where the phenomenon is much more conspicuous. This being said, when the proclitics of Hiw are overtly marked – as in (76) or (79) – they do conform to the same principles as for Lo-Toga.
- <sup>26</sup> To be precise, Lo-Toga alternates between two allomorphs: an assibilated form *si* (< \*ti), and an elided form *t'* [t] when preceded or followed by a vowel – see (80), (87), (88). I here lump the two synchronic allomorphs under the underlying (and ancestral) form \*ti, for the sake of the discussion.
- <sup>27</sup> I adopted similar methodological principles for the analysis of discontinuous TAM markers in Mwothlap (François 2003: 30 sqq, 343). Incidentally, most of the compound forms of Mwothlap involved a postclitic *tō* [tɔ], with which the Torres form *ti/si* is cognate.
- <sup>28</sup> This freedom of actionality combinations provides further support to the view explained above, that the two perfects should not be analyzed compositionally, but as (discontinuous) TAM markers in their own right, with specific properties.
- <sup>29</sup> See Givón (1984:241), Tomlin (1985), Lambrecht (1994:60).
- <sup>30</sup> Other strategies for clause topicalization have been observed, for example, with the “background topic clauses” found in Chuave, a language of Papua New Guinea (Thurman 1979, cited by Givón 1990:870). Clause topicalization is a common phenomenon in North Vanuatu, but in the neighbouring Banks languages, it involves the use of deictics rather than of TAM strategies (François, in prep.).
- <sup>31</sup> Ex. (8) above illustrates the same pronoun *noké* ‘[it's] me’ in a direct NP predicate structure.
- <sup>32</sup> Evans (2007), in his article on “insubordination”, cites similar instances of ‘hidden’ cleft constructions in certain Australian languages. For example, the language Ngandi (Evans 2007:414, after Heath 1985) expresses focusing on the subject by combining an ordinary subject NP with a verb form that is formally marked as subordinate (with *ga-*): e.g. *ni-dereṃu ni-ga-ruḍu-ŋi*, literally ‘[it's] the man [who] went<sub>SUBORD</sub>’. The structural similarity with our proposed analysis (91) is here worth of notice: in both cases, the surface form of the sentence seems to consist of a single clause, where underlyingly there are two.