

Chapter 6

Verb morphology

This chapter sets out to describe the internal structure of verbs, focusing on both their inflectional and derivational morphology. The verb class is the only word class that shows inflection. The verb is thus unambiguously defined by inflection. In this respect, the copula is a verb, but it differs from other non-copula verbs in that it cannot head a verb phrase. It appears in a nominal predicate phrase (§7.2). A verb inflects word-finally. I call the portion of the verb word other than the inflection a stem. I call a minimal stem a root. However, a stem may be a compound and/or may be derived by affixation. A verb stem may be derived from another verb or from a property concept stem. The former process is described in this chapter, while the latter is described in Chapter 8.

6.1. Functional overview

6.1.1. Verb inflection and finiteness

A primary distinction is made between finite inflection, i.e. inflection that specifies tense and/or mood, and non-finite inflection, i.e. the inflection that specifies neither. Negative polarity is an inflectional category compatible with both inflection types.

Syntactically, finite verb forms can terminate a sentence, while non-finite verbs cannot terminate a sentence, always occurring subordinated, coordinated, or chained to a matrix clause (Chapter 11).

6.1.2. Tense, mood, negation, voice, and aspect

Typologically common predicate categories such as tense, mood-modality, negation, voice, and aspect, are encoded in various ways in Irabu, not necessarily in verb morphology.¹ Since these encodings often show complex interdependency and/or involve larger structures (phrases and clauses), they will be discussed more fully in Chapter 10 (the simple sentence). In what follows I outline the categories thus encoded as a basis for the subse-

¹ Irabu verbs do not have agreement morphology, i.e. are not inflected for person, number, etc., of subject.

quent description of verb morphology.

6.1.2.1. Tense, mood-modality, and negation

Tense, mood, and negation are expressed by verb inflection. Two mood categories are grammaticalised as verb inflection: realis and irrealis. A fuller discussion of mood occurs in §10.5.1, and it suffices here to note that realis mood expresses the speaker's perceived certainty (e.g. on the basis of actuality) and high information value (i.e. new information to the hearer), whereas irrealis mood expresses future intention or wish. There are also forms that are unmarked for mood.

There are of course other kinds of non-grammaticalised modality (e.g. uncertainty, guess, potentiality, necessity, hearsay evidentiality, etc.), which are expressed by various non-inflectional strategies, e.g. through modal markers such as =*pazi* 'maybe' (§9.3).

The tense system involves a two-way distinction between past and non-past. Whereas all non-finite verbs are not tense-marked, many finite verbs are marked with tense. There are a few finite verb forms that are not tense-marked: these are intentional, optative, and imperative forms, which have no formal opposition between past and non-past, simply carrying a mood suffix attached to the stem.

Mood is also crucially implicated in encoding time reference. Thus a non-past realis form implies immediate future time reference in which an action or state of affairs is imminent (e.g. a situation obviously about to occur in front of speaker, as in *Hai! uti-r-m=dooi!* 'Hey! The base is about to drop!'), whereas the non-tense-marked finite forms, i.e. irrealis forms such as *-di* (intentional) usually imply non-immediate future time reference, though this is not an inherent function of *-di*. Also, modal possibilities are dependent on tense in crucial ways. As is shown in FIGURE 6–1, the realis mood form is only found in past tense (e.g. *ibi-ta-m* 'plant-PST-RLS: (certainly) planted') and non-past tense that designates present or imminent future time reference (e.g. *ibi-r-m* 'plant-NPST-RLS: be going to plant'). This asymmetry in the distribution of realis mood is a formal manifestation of the semantic fact that past time reference and future time reference are asymmetrical with regard to mood (Comrie 1985a; Chung and Timberlake

| | | | |
|----------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| Time reference | Past >>>>>> | Present to imminent future >> | Future >>>>> |
| TENSE | Past | Non-past | N/A |
| MOOD | { Realis } { Unmarked } | { Realis } { Unmarked } | Irrealis |

FIGURE 6–1. Tense system and mood system: overview

1985). Making a realis assertion with future time reference is much more difficult than making one with past or present/imminent future time reference.

Negative polarity is also inflectional, and is again intertwined with the tense/mood systems. In particular, negation is incompatible with the non-past realis. Thus *ibi-r-m* 'is going to plant' cannot be negated, whereas *ibi-r* (non-past unmarked) has a negative counterpart *ibi-n*. This can be seen as an instantiation of a typologically recurrent restriction on the compatibility of negation with realis (in fact, there are languages which treat all negative clauses as irrealis; Payne 1997: 245).

6.1.2.2. Voice

Three types of non-active voice (causative, passive, malefactive) are marked by derivational morphology on verbs (§6.4; §10.4). In Japanese linguistics, malefactive would alternatively be called 'adversative passive' (Shibatani 1990 for a review). However, if we restrict the term passive voice to a valency *decreasing* operation (Dixon and Aikhenvald 2000), it should not be treated as a type of passive in Irabu or in Japanese (see §10.4.3 for a fuller discussion).

6.1.2.3. Aspect

Aspect is marked by three different coding strategies: (1) aspectual auxiliary verb, as in *ibi-i=du ur-Ø* 'be planting' (plant-NRT=FOC PROG-NPST), (2) verb inflection, as in *ibi-tar* (perfective), etc., and (3) full reduplication of a verb root, as in *ibi+ibi* '(iteratively) plant; (habitually) plant'. Aspectual categories that are productively coded by one or more of these strategies are progressive, resultative, prospective 'complete something for some benefit', perfect, iterative, and habitual. Since aspect marking requires reference to a range of structures, from verb morphology to VP structure, it will be dealt with more extensively in §10.5.2 after all the relevant structures have been introduced.

6.1.3. Inflection and clause combining

Irabu verb inflection also encodes clausal subordination and clause chaining. These structures are described in Chapter 11. In what follows I only note their basic characteristics in relation to verb inflection.

A non-finite verb form called a converb is used mainly to mark adverbial or adsentential subordination. That is, a converb turns its clause into an adjunct constituent (adverbial or adsentential), retaining verbal features in its clause-internal syntax, as illustrated in the examples below (the comma or-