

How to Express Desires in Blackfoot

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1. Introduction

In English, when talking about past events, "wish" is usually used in a counterfactual context while "hope" is used in a non-counterfactual context:

- (1) I wish he had won the soccer game.
(Context: I know he didn't win.)
- (2) I hope he won the soccer game.
(Context: I don't know whether he won or not, but I hope he did.)

Blackfoot, however, has the same lexical entry *sstaa* for both "wish" and "hope". This research will investigate two main questions:

- a. **How to use *sstaa* to express desires in Blackfoot:** what are the basic sentence structures? How to encode different tenses and aspects of the desired events?
- b. **How to differentiate counterfactual and non-counterfactual desires of *sstaa*:** it is based on the use of different morphemes (e.g., subjunctive, irrealis) or merely based on contexts.

3. Tenses and Aspects of Desired Events

Blackfoot is a tenseless language. As predicted, there is no morphological contrast between the past desired event (as in 6) and the future desired event (as in 7).

- (6) Nitsikoohtst omaahksooyihsi (matoni)
nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-yi (matoni)
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj (yesterday)
"I hope that he ate (yesterday)."
- (7) Nitsikoohtst omaahksooyihsi (aapinakosi)
nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-yi (tomorrow)
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj (tomorrow)
"I hope that he will eat (tomorrow)."

There are morphological contrasts between no aspect (as in 8), progressive aspect (as in 9) and perfect aspect (as in 10) of desired events.

- (8) nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-**s**-ooyi/ooka-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-?-eat/sleep-conj-conj
"I hope that he ate/slept / will eat/sleep."
- (9) nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-a-ooyi/ooka-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-eat/sleep-conj-conj
"I hope that he is / was eating/sleeping."
- (10) Nitsikoohtst omaahksikooyihsi
nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-**sik**-ooyi/ayooka-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-**perf**-eat/sleep-conj-conj
"I hope that he has eaten/slept."

5. Future Research

- i) What is the function of *ooh*- and what is the semantic difference between (3) and (4).
- ii) Will the tense and aspect of *sstaa* influence the tense and aspect of its embedded clause?

2. Basic Structures

- (3) Nitsiksst nin/kit/om aahksooyihsi
nit-**ik**-sstaa nin/kit/om-aahk-s-ooyi-**hs-yi**
1-**very**-want 1/2/3-non.factive-?-eat-**conj-conj**
"I want (myself) / you / him to eat"
- (4) Nitsikoohtst nin/kit/om aahksooyihsi
nit-ik-**ooh**-sstaa nin/kit/om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 1/2/3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj
"I hope that I / you / he will eat."

There are several unclear points in these basic sentence structures of *sstaa*:

- i) *ik*- is glossed as "intensifier" and translated as "very" in Frantz (1991). Based on my consultant, *ik*- cannot be deleted in (3) and (4), which suggests that it functions more than a mere intensifier.
- ii) Without *ooh*- (as in 3), it is consistently translated as "want" by my consultant; with *ooh*- (as in 4), it is consistently translated as "hope". It is still unclear what is the semantic difference between (3) and (4), and what is the function of *ooh*-.
- iii) According to Frantz (1991), -hs and -yi are conjunctive suffixes used in embedded clauses. But there are exceptional cases where conjunctive suffixes don't show up:
- (5) Nitsikst ninaahksikkamokska'si
nit-ik-sstaa nin-aahk-ikkam-okska'si
1-very-want 1-non.factive-fast-run
"I want to run fast."

4. Counterfactuals

There is no morphological contrasts between counterfactual (as in 11) and non-counterfactual (as in 12) events under *sstaa*. Speakers differentiate them merely based on contexts. Bar-el & Denzer-king (2008) proposes that UNREAL is used in counterfactual conditionals (as in 13) while SUBJUNCTIVE is used in normal conditionals. But under *sstaa*, neither of these two morphemes is used in counterfactual or non-counterfactual contexts.

Non-counterfactual contexts: *I made a pie for my son yesterday. Today, I still don't know whether he ate it or not yesterday, but I hope he did.*

- (11) Nitsikoohtst omaahksooyihsi
nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj
"I hope that he ate."

Counterfactual contexts: *I made a pie for my son yesterday but he didn't eat it, and then he got really hungry last night. Today I am talking with my friend: "I wish that yesterday he had eaten. If he had eaten, he wouldn't have been hungry."*

- (12) Nitsikoohtst omaahksooyihsi
nit-ik-*ooh*-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-yi
1-very-?-want 3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj
"I wish that he had eaten."
- (13) iiyihtopi maataaksistsookin
i-ooyi-**ohtopi** imaat-aak-sistsi-ookin
3-eat-**UNREAL** NEG-FUT-become-hungry
"If he had eaten, he wouldn't have been hungry."

References

- Bar-el, Leora & Denzer-King, Ryan. 2008. *Irrealis in Blackfoot*. Santa Barbara Papers in Linguistics, Volume 19, 2008.
- Frantz, Donald. 1991. *Blackfoot Grammar*. University of Toronto Press.