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) Nitsikoohst 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) Nitsikoohst 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-ya
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-ya
1-very-want 3-non.factive-eat/sleep-conj-conj
"I hope that he is / was eating/sleeping."

(10) Nitsikoohst omaahkssikoooyihsi
nit-ik-ooh-sstaa om-aahk-sik-ooyi/ayooka-hs-ya
1-very-want 3-non.factive-perf-?-eat/sleep-conj-conj
"I hope that he has eaten/slept."

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) Nitsikoohst omaahksooyihsi
nit-ik-ooh-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-ya
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) Nitsikoohst omaahksooyihsi
nit-ik-ooh-sstaa om-aahk-s-ooyi-hs-ya
1-very-want 3-non.factive-?-eat-conj-conj
"I wish that he had eaten."

(13) Iyihtopi maatsaaksissookin
3-eat-UNREAL NEG-FUT-become-hungry
"If he had eaten, he wouldn't have been hungry."

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?

References