

Settledness and morphosyntactic variation across Romance

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Cross-linguistic research on tense/mood variation typically analyzes specific morphosyntactic environments separately and, as a result, a range of explanations have been put forth which apply, for example, only to conditionals or imperatives. We propose that an analysis based on the semantic-pragmatic notion of settledness (e.g. Thomason & Gupta 1980) can account for tense/mood variation across different syntactic contexts in a way that unites disparate linguistic descriptions. Specifically, an analysis based on settledness captures the utility of using tense/mood to convey pragmatic information about speaker confidence in the realization of future eventualities.

The notion of settledness as applied to conditionals (Kaufmann 2002, 2005; see also Sherman & Chun 2018) is concerned with the likelihood that a future eventuality will hold: if an eventuality is settled, it has already been “decided” and it is therefore metaphysically necessary that it occur. Here, we look at presumed settledness, i.e. speakers’ presentation of future eventualities as settled or guaranteed to hold, even though (by nature as futures) they actually are not. Assuming a Kratzerian possible worlds semantics (Kratzer 1981), a proposition *p* is presumed settled iff every world in the doxastic alternatives of a speaker’s beliefs at speech time is such that each of its historical alternatives evolves into a *p* world. Thus, presumed settledness (Kaufmann 2002) takes into account not only speaker knowledge but, importantly for the unknowable future, speaker desires and beliefs/assumptions as well.

We analyze pairs of contrasting forms across several Romance languages. While only some of these forms make inherent reference to temporal distinctions such as present and future--some reflect modal and others person differences--we argue that the pragmatic motivation for the alternations is the same in all cases: they encode and reflect speaker judgments about the (lack of) settledness of the future eventuality under consideration, operationalized in terms of the related notions of immediacy and speaker certainty.

Consider first future-framed adverbials, where the present indicative (PI) conveys presumed settledness in contrast with the normative forms in Italian (1a), Argentine Spanish (1b), Brazilian Portuguese (1c), and French (1d). The present indicative is felicitous in all four languages when the future eventuality is immediate and the context shows the speaker to be certain that it will occur, but is deemed inappropriate to describe distant or doubtful future actions (Hoff 2019).

- (1) a. Ti chiamo quando **arrivo** [PI] (cf. **arriverò** [future indicative]).
b. Te llamo cuando **llego** [PI] (cf. **llegue** [present subjunctive]).
c. Te ligo quando **chego** [PI] (cf. **chegar** [future subjunctive]).
d. Je t’appelle quand j’**arrive** [PI] (cf. **arriverai** [future indicative]).
‘I’ll call you when I get there.’

Similarly, choice of form is sensitive to settledness in imperatives. In Argentine Spanish, Johnson (2016) argues that 2SG negative imperatives take the *vos* rather than the *tú* paradigm when the speaker has high epistemic certainty that the addressee was going to perform the action described. Another way to understand this contrast is in terms of

settledness: the speaker presumes it settled that the addressee in (2) was going to throw the item in the trash.

- (2) No **tirés [vos]** eso a la basura (cf. **tires [tú paradigm]**).
'Don't throw that in the trash.'

Likewise, in Brazilian Portuguese, 2SG imperatives, both affirmative and negative, alternate between present subjunctive (*você*) and present indicative (*tu*) forms. As demonstrated by Lamberti and Schwenter (2018), the indicative form is more likely to be chosen when the situation is temporally immediate, the subjunctive when it is not. This contrast may more appropriately be recast in terms of settledness, such that the speaker in (3) presumes it settled that the addressee will not shut the door unless commanded to do so.

- (3) Fecha a porta! (cf. **feche [present subjunctive]**)
'Shut the door!'

Finally, speakers of both Brazilian and European Portuguese use tense/mood contrasts in future-referring conditionals to convey differences in settledness; the present indicative, rather than the normative future subjunctive, is used when the speaker presumes settled that the action described in the protasis will occur (4). So-called "factual" conditionals thereby receive an explanation that aligns them with similar variability in other realms of grammar.

- (4) Se **chego [PI]** na hora, te ligo (cf. **chegar [future subjunctive]**).
'If I arrive on time, I'll call you.'

The theoretical advantage of our account lies in the way that it unites disparate descriptions of morphosyntactic phenomena across languages. Instead of analyzing future-framed adverbials, imperatives, and conditionals separately and by individual language, and treating them in terms of immediacy, epistemic certainty, or other diverse notions, analyzing this variation in terms of settledness brings these phenomena together under one overarching pragmatic concept that has clear communicative motivations.

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