

Conditionals in the Yukaghir languages

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1. Introduction

This paper describes the encoding of conditional meaning in two extant Yukaghir languages, Tundra and Kolyma Yukaghir. In the context of a typological project, the very formulation of this task implies the existence of a semantic concept (*IF*) which exists, in one or another sense, in the semantic inventory of any language. The strongest version of this hypothesis is integrated into Anna Wierzbicka's Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). In NSM, *IF* is identified as "the basic and indefinable sense of the English word *if*" in canonical contexts like *If I do this, all these people will do the same* (Wierzbicka 1998: 178). Any other language could be invoked in this characterization, since *IF* is hypothesized to exist as **the sense of a lexical unit** in any human language; that is, *IF* is a lexical universal. Another side of the same hypothesis is that *IF* cannot be paraphrased in terms of other lexical units; it is an indefinable "semantic prime". In other words, the only way for a language to express *IF* is to use one of its units with precisely this sense; the absence of such units would create "irreplaceable, irreparable gaps" in the language's semantic system (Wierzbicka 1998:179).

As I will try to show in this paper, the Yukaghir languages falsify the hypothesis of *IF* as a universal semantic prime in Wierzbicka's sense. As a research heuristic, I adopt Wierzbicka's notion of *IF* as a conceptual primitive, which implies, in effect, that sentences of any language can be better identified as conditional (*IF*-sentence) or non-conditional on the basis of one's own understanding of what *if* means, rather than on the basis of any formal or informal definition.¹ Conditional sentences identified in this way are text tokens, i.e., it is not assumed that a linguistic expression that contains *IF* in some contexts must retain this semantic property in any other context. Section 2 describes all Yukaghir constructions that are used to encode conditional sentences. From the formal viewpoint, these constructions are defined in terms of the morphological encoding of two verbs, the *IF*-verb (the main verb of an *IF*-clause) and the finite verb. Their semantics is described in a relaxed version of NSM, that is, the semantic relations between clauses are described in terms of NSM "primes" like *IF*, *WHEN*, or *BECAUSE*. These constructions fall into two groups. In one group of constructions, *IF* belongs to the meaning of construction, but this sense is expressed compositionally; the meaning of such a construction is always more specific than *IF*. The other group comprises constructions that can encode *IF* as one of contextual variants of a different concept, which can be identified as one of the Yukaghir "semantic primes" and is expressed by means of the **Scene-Setting construction**.² This construction is defined by the final suffix of the *IF*-verb and dominates virtually all more specific constructions that can encode *IF*. The semantics of this construction is analyzed in Section 3.

2. The morphological encoding of conditional semantic structure

2.1. Grammar note. Conditional sentences are encoded as clause chains:³

- (1) a. kudede-**ŋide** edin pušnina-gi čumu mid'-u-t
 [kill-SS:SET] [this fur-POSS all take-0-FUT(TR:1SG)]
 'When/if I kill him, I will take all his furs.' (N38)
- b. met+moj-**l-u-gene** met tet-ul aŋd'e-š-u-t
 [REFL-hold-1|2-0-DS:SET] [I you-ACC eye-CAUS-0-FUT(TR:1SG)]
 'If you hold yourself still, I will make you an eye.' (N31)

A clause chain consists of a **finite** clause marked for tense, aspect, mood, illocution, and evidentiality, and one or more **medial** clauses marked for switch reference, i.e., the medial verb takes a suffix (below, **clause linker**) that signals whether or not the subject of the medial clause is coreferential with that of the **controlling** clause, see (1). The medial clause situation can be **simultaneous** with or **anterior** to the controlling clause situation; the only exception from this rule is the Inferential Conditional Construction in Kolyma Yukaghir (see Section 2.5). Normally, the finite clause is the final clause of its chain, and the controlling clause for each medial clause is the next clause of the chain; if a medial clause follows the finite clause, it is controlled by the latter, see (2b).

Table 1. Different-Subject Clause Linkers (Krejnovich 1982:167)

| | Kolyma Yukaghir | | Tundra Yukaghir | |
|-----|---------------------------|---------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| | Neutral | Scene-Setting | Neutral | Scene-Setting |
| 1 2 | -l-ge -l-u-ke, -l-u-ge | -l-gene -l-u-kene, -l-u-gene | -l-ha -l-a-qa | -l-hane -l-a-qane |
| 3SG | -de-ge | -de-h-ne~-de-j-ne | -da-ha | -da-hane |
| 3PL | -ŋi-de-ge | -ŋi-de-h-ne~-ŋi-de-j-ne | -ŋu-da-ha | -ŋu-da-hane |

Table 2. Major Same-Subject Clause Linkers

| | Kolyma Yukaghir ¹ | Tundra Yukaghir ² |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Neutral: | | |
| Imperfective | -t | -r, -re-ŋ~-de-ŋ |
| Iterative | -de~-te | |
| Perfective | -delek~-telek | -relek~-delek |
| Scene-Setting: | | |
| Perfective | -ŋide | -re~-de -relde~-delde |

Notes: 1. Syllable-initial /d/ alternates with /t/ after voiceless consonants.

2. Syllable-initial /r/ alternates with /d/ after voiced consonants.

Clause linkers fall into two groups, **Scene-Setting** and **Neutral** linkers (Tables 1-2; see Section 3 for motivation for these functional labels). With one minor exception (Section 2.2), *IF*-clauses are encoded by one of the Scene-Setting clause linkers. In what follows, the term **Scene-Setting construction** refers to any binary structure where one clause is marked by a Scene-Setting linker controlled by the other.

With the exception of the **Evidential** Scene-Setting construction in Kolyma Yukaghir (see Section 2.5), a clause chain can encode conditional relation only if the finite verb overtly expresses a marked meaning of one of the following morphological categories (the marked members of each opposition are underlined):

Mood: Imaginative⁴ (pre-verb *et-*) vs. Real. The Imaginative form encodes events that are conceived of as possible only under certain conditions, which can but need not be made explicit; it is unmarked for temporal reference.

Tense: Future (suffix *-te-*) vs. non-Future (zero marking); there is no morphological present vs. past distinction.

Illocution: Imperative vs. non-Imperative. These forms have distinct person/number paradigms.

Aspect: Habitual (suffix T *-nun-*, K *-nun(nu)-* or *-nu-*) vs. non-Habitual (a non-Habitual form may be either unmarked for aspect or contain another aspect marker).⁵ The Habitual form refers to a class of recurrent situations (including generic statements). This type of reference (**quasi-generic reference**) is marked obligatorily, that is, a non-Habitual form always refers to a specific situation.

The morphological category of **evidentiality** exists for unmarked TAM-forms only and distinguishes three forms:

Witnessed: a situation witnessed by the speaker or another discourse-prominent observer (zero marking).

Inferential: a past/present situation that has not been witnessed but can be inferred from reliable evidence, including visible results of the situation and witnesses' reports (*-l'el-*). The situation being described takes place simultaneously with or, more commonly, prior to the time when the evidence is received.

Prospective: a future situation entailed by a present state of affairs (T *-mori-*, K *-moži-*).

To sum up, a finite clause is unmarked for TAM and evidentiality only if it refers to a specific situation witnessed by the time of speech (see 2.5 for the only exception from this rule). This combination of features will be referred to below as **witnessed status**. Accordingly, a clause has **non-witnessed status** if it describes a future situation, a non-witnessed past/present situation, or refers to a class of similar situations. The non-witnessed status does not imply non-positive epistemic stance, i.e., an overt marker of evidentiality does not affect the epistemic meaning of the clause.

2.2. Imaginative conditional sentences. This class subsumes conditional sentences with Imaginative finite verbs. In Kolyma Yukaghir, the Imaginative marker occurs only in **counterfactual** conditional sentences; conversely, the Imaginative construction is the only way to express counterfactual conditional structure. The *IF*-clause takes one of the Scene-Setting linkers, which must be preceded by the suffix *-l'el-*. The temporal reference is unmarked:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (2) a. abute-č-a:-l'el-gene m-et+jerqoge-jek
 [pour-ITER-INGR-INFR:12-DS:SET] AFF-IMG-move-INTR:2SG
 ‘If I were to start to pour out (now), you would move.’ (N31)
- b. ta:t u:j-t žad'i:-t m-et+el'ed'o:-jek
 [CA work-SS:IPFV] [be.greedy-SS:IPFV AFF-IMG+disappear-INTR:2SG]
 el+kes'i:-l'el-ŋide
 NEG+bring-INFR-SS:SET
 ‘Working in such a way, you would have become greedy and ruined yourself, if you had not brought it back.’ (N32)

Thus, the Kolyma Yukaghir Imaginative Scene-Setting construction can be represented as follows:⁶

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (8) a. met poŋis'e leŋd-o:l'-**ŋide** kiete-din noho mundej-k
 [my fat eat-DSDR-SS:SET] mix-SUP sand bring-IMP:2SG
 'If you want to eat my fat, bring some sand to mix with it.' (N29)
- b. joulus'-**ŋi-de-j-ne** mon [...]
 [ask-PL-DS-COND] say(IMP:2SG)
 'When/if they ask, say: [...]' (N22)

The Predictive Scene-Setting construction is also used to encode **temporal** settings with future temporal reference, see (8b), (9), (11).

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (9) jekečan **jiel'e-de-jne** leŋ-de-t-či:li
 [bowl get.ready-3SG-DS:SET] eat-DETR-FUT-INTR:1PL
 'When the bowl boils, we will eat.' (N2)

A Predictive Scene-Setting clause is interpreted as conditional if a broader context suggests that the contrasting alternative [*NOT p*] is considered possible (non-positive epistemic stance towards *p*). The temporal relation between linked situations does not depend on the epistemic stance: in either case, it is determined by the general constraint on clause chaining (see Section 2.1). As it seems, the only way to gloss the meaning of this construction in NSM is to split it into two distinct meanings, along the following lines:

- (10) **P-SET Q-(FUT/IMP)**
 [*WHEN/AFTER p, q*] **or** [*IF p, q*]

For an alternative description of this meaning, see Section 3.

In Tundra Yukaghir, the medial verb of the Predictive Scene-Setting construction can attach either the Imperfective Scene-Setting linker **-re~-de**, which is also used in other conditional sentences, or the Perfective Scene-Setting linker **-relde~-delde**, which is available in Predictive constructions only. The Perfective Scene-Setting clause describes a future situation which is supposed to be completed before the main clause situation begins; the Imperfective Scene-Setting linker **-re~-de** is neutral with regard to the relative past vs. present distinction. In both cases, the epistemic stance towards *p* can but need not be positive (cf. (11) and (12)).

TUNDRA YUKAGHIR

- (11) a. eguojie ise ile-ha ewre-re neme-n
 tomorrow perhaps deer-LOC walk-SS:SET what-AT
 d'i:be me-juo-**te-mk**
 miracle AFF-see-FUT-2PL
 'Perhaps tomorrow, when you are roaming with the deer, you'll see something miraculous.' (T4)
- b. juohaj-**relde** samqra:l+bure kudie-te-hane-k
 finished-SS:SET:PFV table+on lie-FUT-IMP-2
 'When you are finished, lie down on the table.' (T1)

TUNDRA YUKAGHIR

- (12) a. tet men-**delde** el-mo:j-**te-je-k**
 you take-SS:SET:PFV NEG-hold-FUT-INTR-2SG
 'If you take them, you won't keep them.' (T6)

- b. met aru: t'aw-re met-ul pun'i-l+dite
 my word cut-SS:SET I-ACC kill-ANR+like
 pan-te-je-k
 be.like-FUT-INTR-2SG
 'If you refuse, I will be as aggrieved as if you kill me.' (T6)

The DS Scene-Setting form can contain the Prospective suffix **-mori-** 'be going to':

TUNDRA YUKAGHIR

- (13) a. mala: l'ie el-mor-**mori-da-hane** kot'ejk alhan u:-te-j-l'i
 IMP DP [NEG-hear-PRSP-3-DS:SET] DP HORT go-FUT-INTR-1PL
 'All right, if he is not going to hear it, let's go.' (T5)
 b. met sunduk-te potine-j pohode ki:-**mori-la-qane**
 I trunk-RP full-INTR money give-PRSP-1/2-DS:SET
 me-ki:-t
 AFF-give-FUT(1SG)
 'If you are going to give me enough money to fill my trunk, I'll give it to you.' (T5)

The Prospective DS form occurs only in Predictive Scene-Setting constructions and only in Tundra Yukaghir. This marking is incompatible with the temporal interpretation of a Scene-Setting clause.

2.4. "Course-of-events" conditional sentences. This class subsumes sentences with the finite form in the Habitual form and a Scene-Setting medial form. The Scene-Setting clause refers to a class of recurrent situations, each of which triggers a temporally adjacent finite clause situation:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (14) a. čuöte tet-ul juö-**nu** tet l'e-l-u-**gene**
 always you-ACC see-IPFV(TR:1SG) [you be-12-0-DS:SET]
 'I always look at you when/if you are here.' (N2)
 b. mit jo:bi ejre-t end'o:n **nuŋ-ŋide** lebie-ge
 [we in.forest walk-SS:IPFV] [animal find-SS:SET] earth-LOC
 n'e-leme el+pejži:-**nu-jil'i**
 NEG-what NEG+throw:ITER-IPFV-INTR:1PL
 'When/if we walk in the forest and find (=kill) an animal, we never throw anything on the earth.' (N34)

The **relation** between each single occurrence of the scene-setting situation and the temporally adjacent occurrence of the finite clause situation is the same as in the Predictive Scene-Setting construction, see (10). In this case, however, the choice between *WHEN* and *IF* interpretations cannot be motivated by the (context-determined) epistemic stance towards *p*: this construction is used only if a given scene-setting situation is assumed to take place on a number of occasions. In fact, there seems to be no principled way to draw the *IF* vs. *WHEN* distinction in this context.

2.5. Evidential conditional sentences. This class subsumes conditional sentences with finite verbs unmarked for TAM; the *IF*-clause takes a Scene-Setting linker; such sentences exist in Kolyma Yukaghir only. They fall into two major types, Prospective (Prospective form of the finite verb) and Inferential (Inferential or Witnessed form of the finite verb).

Prospective conditionals are semantically close to the Predictive conditionals (see 2.3), but the Prospective marker contributes the notion of cause-effect relation between the situations:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (15) čied'e-me legul čemej-**de-jne** leŋ-d-o:l'-i-t
[winter-TMP food finish-3SG-DS-COND] [eat-DETR-DSDR-0-SS:IPFV
amde-**moži**:l'i
die-PRSP:INTR:1PL]
'If the food is over in the winter, we will die from hunger (because of this).'

In contrast with the Predictive Scene-Setting construction, the Prospective construction is unambiguously conditional; however, its meaning is more complex than *IF* and can be represented as follows:

- (16) **P-SET Q-PRSP**
IF p, [q *BECAUSE* p].

Inferential conditionals present the finite clause situation as **inferable** from a **later** situation encoded by the Scene-Setting clause, that is, a clause chain of the form **P-SET Q-INFR** expresses a complex meaning like (17):

- (17) [*IF* p, [ONE CAN SAY THAT q]] (*BECAUSE IF* [NOT q], p IS NOT POSSIBLE)

This meaning is obviously distinct from the basic *IF* and will be referred to below as inferential conditional meaning (or inferential *IF*); among other distinctions, it implies the reverse temporal order of linked situations:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (18) tudel eksil'-gi čuö uj-o:-**de-jne** tud-in
he boat-3 already work-RES-3-DS:SET he-DAT
qamie-d'a:-**l'el**-ŋi
help-INFR-3PL(INTR)
'If his boat is ready, it means that they have helped him [because he could not have managed without their help]'

In sentences like (18), the “inferential” part of inferential *IF* is obviously motivated by the meaning of the Inferential suffix (see 2.1). However, since this suffix signifies non-future temporal reference, it cannot be used if the finite clause situation is supposed to be possible in future. In this case, the same semantic structure is expressed by the Scene-Setting construction with **unmarked** finite verb:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (19) el-kel-l-u-**kene** **m+amde-je**
NEG-come-1/2-0-DS:SET AFF-die-INTR(1SG)
'If I do not come, it will mean that I will have died.' (N50)⁸

Since the unmarked finite form expresses witnessed status outside this context (see 2.1), the inferential-in-the-future meaning has to be analyzed as “induced” by the Scene-Setting construction.

2.6. S-Hypothesis. The data presented in this section reveal a problem that cannot be solved within a NSM-based approach: the meanings of some constructions used for encoding of *IF* cannot be adequately explicated in terms of NSM. In particular, this is the

case for the Predictive Scene-Setting construction (see 2.3) and for the Habitual Scene-Setting construction (see 2.4), and thus for the (more schematic) Scene-Setting Construction itself. The Yukaghir languages exhibit a cross-linguistically recurrent *IF/WHEN* coding pattern in canonical “predictive” contexts (Thompson and Longacre 1985:193), which suggests that *IF* may exist in Yukaghir only as a contextual variant of another semantic concept. Indeed, the **relation** between clauses expressed by the Scene-Setting construction appears to be the same for all specific instances of this construction described in this section, with the only exception of the Inferential constructions. This relation differs from *IF* in that it does not imply non-positive epistemic modality (which may but need not be expressed within the same sentence) and is thus conceptually simpler than *IF*. It may be the case that it is this relation (below, S-meaning), and not *IF*, that should be identified as one of the Yukaghir “semantic primes”: that is, to use Wierzbicka’s own wording, “the basic and indefinable sense” of the Scene-Setting construction in the canonical contexts like in (1); this hypothesis is referred to below as S-hypothesis. Alternatively, the Scene-Setting construction can be polysemous, i.e., have two distinct indefinable senses, *WHEN* and *IF*.

The S-hypothesis can be neither verified nor falsified within the NSM approach: if the meaning of each sentence has to be reduced to NSM semantic primes, this hypothesis is bound to be rejected in favor of polysemy analysis (cf. Wierzbicka 1996, 1997, 1998), insofar as an interpretation like *IF OR WHEN* is inappropriate in any specific discourse context.⁹ If, however, a language is allowed its own set of semantic primes (i.e., their universality is not taken for granted), then the S-meaning is a semantic prime and thus cannot and must not be defined, which means that the S-hypothesis can be adopted without further discussion. Since neither of these approaches seems particularly revealing, Section 3 adopts a more traditional procedure of semantic analysis.

Another problem posed by the Yukaghir data is the absence of **specific real** conditionals with past or present temporal reference, as exemplified by English sentences like *If it is raining out there, my car is getting wet* and *If he were at the party, he met Sue*.¹⁰ In fact, the Yukaghir languages appear to have no conventionalized means to express *IF* in this class of contexts. Yet if *IF* exists as one of the senses of the Scene-Setting construction (rather than as a contextual variant of the S-relation), there seem to be no “reasons” for this semantic gap; thus, it may be viewed as a piece of evidence for the S-hypothesis. As will be shown in Section 3, this semantic gap is indeed motivated by the semantics of the Scene-Setting construction.

3. The semantics of the Scene-Setting construction: from *SCENE SETTING* towards *IF*

Within the semantic domain of clause chaining, the Scene-Setting construction is opposed to the Neutral construction, which is characterized by another set of clause linkers (see Tables 1-2). This formal opposition is used to distinguish between two types of semantic structures encoded by clause chaining, which can be schematically represented as follows:

- (20) SCENE-SETTING STRUCTURE: [X-*{Linker ~ IF/WHEN}*] [Y-Illocution]
 CONJOINED STRUCTURE: [X-*{Linker ~ AND}*] Y-Illocution

A **scene-setting** medial clause delimits the domain of applicability of the main predication; it is outside the scope of the illocutionary operators expressed in the finite clause. In the **conjoined** structure, the illocutionary operator applies to the chain as a whole. The Scene-Setting construction unambiguously signals the scene-setting structure (see all examples in Section 2). Neutral encoding is neutral with regard to this distinction (hence the term); for instance, the medial clause of (21) can be interpreted either as a part of the assertion or as a temporal setting (cf. alternative glosses).

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (21) čaj o:že-**t** modo-**l-u-ke** met ejme-n ada:-n
 [tea drink-SS:IPFV] [sit-12-0-DS] [I across-PROL here-PROL
 pužeže-s'
 dart.out-PFV:INTR:3SG]
 ‘(WHEN) I was sitting and drinking tea, (AND) it darted out at the other side.’

Thus, there are two options for encoding of scene-setting clauses: the scene-setting role can either be marked overtly (Scene-Setting construction) or remain unmarked (Neutral construction). The choice between these options strongly correlates with the witnessed vs. non-witnessed status of medial clauses in both Yukaghir languages, but there is a crucial difference in the degree to which this correlation is conventionalized in grammar.

Both languages require overt marking of scene-setting role in three grammatical contexts that unambiguously signal non-witnessed status of all chained clauses:

- (22) The scene-setting role of a medial clause is obligatorily encoded by the Scene-Setting construction if the finite verb stands in the Future, Imperative, or Habitual/Generic form (see **2.3-2.4**).

Accordingly, Neutral encoding signals conjoined structure in these contexts:

KOLYMA YUKAGHIR

- (23) a. ediŋ nodo-pe tet-kele min-**delle** kewe-j-ŋi-**te-j**
 this bird-PL 2SG-ACC take-SS:PFV depart-PFV-PL-FUT-INTR(3)
 ‘These birds will take you away.’ (K5)
 b. tet čolhoro kuded'e lek-**telle** jaqte-ge-k
 you hare liver eat-SS:PFV sing-IMP-2SG
 ‘Eat some hare liver and then sing!’ (N5)
 c. čaj ože-**t** nied'i-**de** qamunde pod'erqo-ge
 tea drink-SS:IPFV talk-SS:ITER few day-LOC
 l'ie-**nunnu-ŋi**
 be-HAB-3PL(INTR)
 ‘They used to spend several days drinking tea and talking.’ (K1)

Apart from these contexts, the Yukaghir languages exhibit slightly differing distributions of the Scene-Setting vs. Neutral coding options. In Kolyma Yukaghir, Neutral encoding is the **only** option if the medial clause refers to a specific witnessed event, as in (21); in Tundra Yukaghir, Scene-Setting encoding of witnessed events is possible, although such examples are extremely rare:

TUNDRA YUKAGHIR

- (24) a. arej neri-nu-**da-hane** sal'hari:-gi **me-lepege-t'**
 DP bite-RPOG-3-DS:SET tooth-3 AFF-fall.off-INTR(3)
 ‘While it was gnawing, its tooth fell out.’ (T8)

- b. kelu:-nu-re ma:rqa-l-l'e qahime albe-han
 come-PROG-SS:SET one-AT-PRNM raven under-PROL
 me-kewe-t' pot'esej-l-ha
 AFF-go-INTR(3) send-1/2-DS
 'While we were walking, one of them followed a raven, I let it go.' (T6)

Conversely, the scene-setting role of a non-witnessed medial clause must be encoded overtly in Kolyma Yukaghir, so that the following bidirectional implication holds:

- (25) The scene-setting role of a medial clause must be marked overtly **if and only if** it has the non-witnesses status.

In Tundra Yukaghir, a non-witnessed scene setter can receive neutral encoding in the context of an Imaginative finite clause (see 2.2).

The correlation between the obligatory marking of scene-setting role and the non-witnessed status can be explained in terms of potential **semantic distance** between conjoined and scene-setting structures. If a chain refers to a series of specific witnessed events, as in (21), the distinction between conjoined and scene-setting readings does not entail any difference in the referential semantics of the chain as a whole and amounts to a shift in the information structure (assertion vs. presupposed material). In the contexts listed in (22), the same distinction may entail a sharp semantic contrast. This is particularly clear in imperative contexts, where the conjoined structure implies that the medial clause is a part of request, cf. (23b) and (8); compare also the intended meaning (as shown in the gloss) and the possible scene-setting interpretations of (23a) (*When/if these birds take you, they will go away*) and (23c) (*Whenever they drank tea and talked, they spent several days*). It may be hypothesized, therefore, that the rule in (25) results from grammaticalization of Grice's AVOID AMBIGUITY maxim with regard to the semantic role of medial clause:

- (26) AVOID AMBIGUITY OF SEMANTIC ROLE OF MEDIAL CLAUSE: The scene-setting role of a medial clause must be marked overtly if Neutral encoding is likely to result in a semantic interpretation that is saliently different from the intended meaning.

In Tundra Yukaghir, the grammaticalization occurred only in the contexts listed in (22). Apart from these contexts, the choice between Neutral and Scene-Setting encoding of scene setters is governed by pragmatic considerations that cannot be reduced to grammaticalized witnessed vs. non-witnessed distinction. The possibility of Neutral encoding in imaginative sentences is apparently determined by the fact that the presence of an *IF*-clause (hence, the scene-setting structure of the chain) is implied by the Imaginative form of the finite verb; this decreases the probability of conjoined reading, and Neutral encoding can be used without violating the AVOID AMBIGUITY constraint. Conversely, the speaker may choose to mark the scene-setting role of a witnessed medial clause if the conjoined reading must be explicitly ruled out in a given context. The relevance of the non-witnessed vs. witnessed distinction surfaces only as a strong statistical correlation between the non-witnessed status and the Scene-Setting marking.

Thus, the function of the Scene-Setting construction in Tundra Yukaghir is to mark the scene-setting role of a medial clause in the overall semantic structure of clause chain.

The epistemic meaning of Scene-Setting clauses is determined by the context, most importantly, by the TAM-form of the finite verb. The unmarked TAM-form signals the positive epistemic stance and precludes the *IF*-interpretation of the scene setter thereby; this explains why real conditionals cannot be expressed by the Scene-Setting construction (see 2.6). The Imaginative form signals a non-positive epistemic stance and thus determines the *IF*-interpretation of a scene setter; other TAM-forms are neutral with regard to epistemic meaning and thus neither preclude nor impose *IF*-interpretation. In this case, the speaker's epistemic stance (hence, the presence of *IF* in the semantics of the chain) may be determined by a broader context. Thus, if the scene-setting role is taken as the basic sense of the Scene-Setting construction (i.e., S-meaning in terms of Section 2.6) and thus included in the set of semantic primes, it is quite easy to propose an NSM-style definition of *IF* in terms of **Yukaghir-based** semantic primes, along the following lines:

(27) *IF* *p*, *q*:

I DO NOT KNOW THAT p; *p*-SET, *q*

where SET stands for (the basic sense of) any Scene-Setting linker.

The divergence between the two Yukaghir languages can be accounted for in terms of a well-known type of language change: a constellation of properties that occurs frequently for pragmatic reasons becomes conventionalized in grammar. Once the Scene-Setting marking becomes obligatory in all contexts that determine the non-witnessed status, this context-induced meaning is **absorbed** by the Scene-Setting construction (see [Bybee et al. 1994:293-295] for a description of this mechanism of semantic change). Accordingly, the Scene-Setting construction cannot be used for witnessed scene-setters, as in (24); as a result, the meaning of non-witnessed scene setting can be expressed independently of the TAM-form of the finite verb, as demonstrated by the Evidential conditional construction in Kolyma Yukaghir.

The Evidential construction can be viewed as a piece of evidence for gradual lexicalization of *IF* in Kolyma Yukaghir. The essential difference between this construction and all other means of encoding *IF* is that the non-positive epistemic modality of a scene-setting clause is **not** motivated by the form of the finite verb; if anything, it is in a direct conflict with the **positive** epistemic meaning implied by the regular meaning of Evidential and Witnessed forms (see 2.1, 2.5). On the other hand, non-positive epistemic meaning is not implied by the non-witnessed status of medial clauses (as signaled by the Scene-Setting construction) either; the non-witnessed status is fully compatible with the positive epistemic stance. Thus, this epistemic modality is an inherent part of the Evidential construction, i.e., it is neither inherited from one of the dominating constructions, nor can it be derived compositionally. This means that the *IF* semantic component of this construction is not induced by the context, but signified by the construction itself. Of course, this construction can hardly be viewed as the Yukaghir unit for *IF*, since its overall semantics is considerably more complex than *IF*. However, it demonstrates that the process of semantic enrichment of the Scene-Setting constructions in Kolyma Yukaghir makes this construction available for a sub-class of real conditionals, which lack conventionalized means of expression in Tundra Yukaghir.¹¹

To sum up, I hope to have shown that *IF* in Yukaghir is encoded as a combination of two concepts, namely, scene-setting role and non-positive epistemic modality. The former concept is lexicalized as the meaning of the Scene-Setting clause chaining construction, whereas the latter may be encoded on the finite verb, determined by a broader discourse context or, in the case of Evidential constructions, constitute an inherent component of constructional meaning. Since the pragmatic “need” to mark the scene-setting role overtly strongly correlates with the non-witnessed status of medial clauses (in particular, with a non-positive modality), this context-induced meaning was absorbed by the Scene-Setting construction in Kolyma Yukaghir, which opened the possibility to encode *IF* in a broader range of semantic contexts.

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¹ Since the basic natural metalanguage of field work on Yukaghir is Russian, which is also the author's native language, it would be more accurate to talk about the “basic and indefinable” meaning of Russian word *esli*. However, this does not make any difference in the context of Wierzbicka's proposal, insofar it implies that *IF* is a lexico-grammatical universal.

² Following the common notational convention, I use Initial Capital Letters to distinguish language-specific constructions from the corresponding language-independent semantic concepts.

³ ABBREVIATIONS: 1 - first person, 1/2 - first or second person, 3 - third person, ABL - Ablative, ACC - Accusative, AFF - affirmative, AT - attributive form, CAUS - Causative, DETR - Detransitive DP - discourse particle, DS - different-subject, FOC - Focus, HAB - Habitual, INFR - Inferential, INST - Instrumental, INTR - intransitive, IPFV - Imperfective, ITER - Iterative, K - Kolyma Yukaghir, LOC - locative, NEG - Negative, OF - object-focus, PL - Plural, POSS - Possessive, PRIV - Privative, PRNM - pronominal, PROG - Progressive, PRSP - prospective, REFL - Reflexive, RES - Resultative, SET - setting, SF - subject-focus, SG - Singular, SS - same-subject, TR - transitive.

SOURCES: N – Nikolaeva 1989; K – Maslova 2001, Kolyma Yukaghir corpus, T – Maslova 2001, Tundra Yukaghir corpus.

⁴ This term is used as defined in (Thompson and Longacre 1985:191-193); more generally, all semantic labels for various types of conditional sentences (predictive, real, etc.), as well as the corresponding labels for Yukaghir constructions (e.g., Predictive) are also applied as suggested in this source.

⁵ The suffix *-nu-* exists in T, but it can only express progressive meaning; in K, this suffix functions as general Imperfective, i.e., it can express both progressive and generic/habitual meaning (see Maslova 2000 for details).

⁶ In the schematic representations of constructions, **P** and **Q** denote linked clauses; *p*, *q* are corresponding elements of semantic structure.

⁷ In Tundra Yukaghir, this suffix is also used in other non-finite forms to signal relative past meaning; in Kolyma Yukaghir, it occurs only in the Imaginative construction.

⁸ This example is one of very few exceptions from the rule of switch-reference: the DS-linker is used despite the shared subject.

⁹ This means that the central empirical hypothesis of the NSM framework, the hypothesis of universality of semantic primes, cannot be falsified within this framework. As a matter of fact, this could not be otherwise, since this empirical hypothesis is also the major theoretical assumption of this approach.

¹⁰ It is not clear whether these sentences express the same *IF* as “canonical” predictive conditionals (hence, *IF* as a element NSM): on the one hand, no such sentences are included in Wierzbicka’s set of canonical *IF*-contexts; on the other hand, if the meaning expressed by such sentences can be defined in NSM, then such a definition must apparently include canonical *IF* in some form.

¹¹ It is interesting to note that the range of conditional structures that can be encoded by the Imaginative marking on the finite verb is broader in Tundra Yukaghir (see Section 2.2); however, it is not the case that the Scene-Setting construction in Kolyma Yukaghir “takes over” the functions that are expressed by the Imaginative construction in Tundra Yukaghir; there seems to be no direct causal link between these processes.