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## THURSDAY INTERDISCIPLINARY COLLOQUIUM

Thursday 08/05/2025

16:15-17:45

Webb 103

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### **Irrealis is not asserted to be real: Evidence from Biblical Hebrew**

Many languages have some form that marks a *realis/irrealis* distinction. This distinction is usually characterized in terms of factuality vs. non-factuality, and this idea has recently been formalized by von Prince et al. (2022). They use a framework where time is seen as branching, and argue that timelines that precede the present (including the present) are indicated by *realis*, and other timelines are *irrealis*.

This view is, as far as I know, the most detailed and rigorous formalization of the *irrealis* as indicating non-factuality. However, it suffers from two problems.

One problem is that of present and past habituais, and the other involves presupposition. Both of these refer to factual events, yet are often marked as *irrealis*.

In this talk I propose to solve the problem of habituais using the branching time framework of Cohen (1999), according to which the habitual still refers to actual events, but is evaluated with respect to timelines that will not actually occur.

In accounting for presupposition, I note that while presupposed material is factual, it is not *asserted* to be factual. I propose that *realis* is asserted to be real; if a proposition is either not asserted or is asserted not to be factual, it may be marked as *irrealis*.

Some scholars attempted to reinterpret habituais or presupposition as non-factual after all; I therefore bring evidence for my proposal from the Biblical Hebrew *yiqtol* (imperfect) form. It is *irrealis*, but can indicate events that are unquestionably factual, and cannot be reinterpreted otherwise.

I argue that, although such cases indicate factual events, these events are not asserted, but rather inferred. I demonstrate this fact by applying the test of *reinforceability*. Originally proposed as a test for implicature, it can apply to all speaker-intended inferences (Ariel 2019).

Therefore, the Biblical Hebrew *irrealis* may indicate perfectly factual events, so long as they are inferred and not asserted. Hence, it provides a counterexample to the claim that *irrealis* always indicates the factual/non-factual dichotomy, and supports the proposal made here.

Click [here](#) to see the colloquium program.

