

THE MORPHO-SYNTAX OF TENSE PARTICLES IN NIUEAN*

*Diane Massam
University of Toronto*

1. Introduction

This paper examines the morpho-syntax of tense in Niuean, an Oceanic language in the Polynesian sub-family, with VSO word order and isolating morphology. As is typical of Oceanic languages (Lynch, Ross and Crowley 2002), tense is expressed in Niuean by an initial particle, commonly the case in VSO languages (Carnie and Guilfoyle 2000, Jouitteau 2005, Bury to appear, Rouveret to appear). This is referred to as TAM, as it contains information about Tense, Aspect, and Mood. (1) shows the array of elements that precede the subject in the Niuean clause. The TAM appears before the verb (2), and it can be followed optionally by Negation (3) and/or a modal (4). (4) and (5) show a post-verbal particle; in (5) the perfect aspect marker, *tuai*. (6) has a null TAM, and illustrates that the predicate can be complex and also illustrates the post-predicate question marker. For more discussion of the modals and post-verbal particles, see Seiter (1980), Sperlich (1997), and Massam (2000, to appear).

- (1) The left periphery and predicate domain:

TAM	Neg <i>ai,</i> <i>nākai</i>	Modal	Pred	Postverbal Particles/ Adverbials	Perf	Q
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- (2) **Ne nofo** a au i Makefu
 Pst live Abs.P 1.Sg Loc.P Makefu
 ‘I lived at Makefu’ (Seiter 4)
- (3) **Ne nākai fetataiaki** e tau tagata pulotu ...
 Pst not agree Abs.C Pl person expert
 ‘The experts don’t agree...’ (*Niue A History*)

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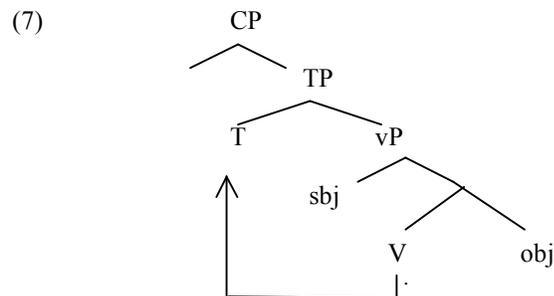
- (4) **To** *nākai liu feleveia foki* a taua.
 Fut not return meet also Abs.P 2.Pl
 ‘We will never again meet.’ (Seiter 16)
- (5) **Kua** *keli tuai e ia e feke ti mate*.
 Perf beat Perf Erg.P 3.Sg Abs.C octopus then die
 ‘She beat the octopus and it died.’ (*Niue A History*)
- (6) a, *fai magaaho nakai* a koe ne nofo ai
 mmm have time Q Abs.P 2.Sg Realis stay there
 a koe i, i Niue?
 Abs.P 2.Sg Loc.P, Loc.P Niue
 ‘mmm, was there a time that you stayed in, in Niue...?’ (LMR)

The central question of this paper is: Does the Niuean system map to a proposed universal template of CP>TP>AspP>VP? In particular, Niuean data raises the question whether T is always below C, and whether T is always the head of the sentence (i.e. T is INFL as discussed in Ritter and Wiltschko to appear, in prep). This paper will argue yes to these questions, but will also outline ways in which Niuean tense is unlike tense in more familiar languages. The focus will be on morpho-syntax: discussion of the fine-grained semantics of tense will not be addressed in this paper (cf. Cowper 2005, Cowper and Hall 2007, Herd 2005, among others).

2. Where is Tense (TAM)?

2.1 Possibilities

I will assume that the VSO word order of Niuean is derived from an underlying SVO order, that is, the arguments remain low while the predicate undergoes fronting (Massam 2000, 2001a,b, 2006). Within this assumption, we might first hypothesize that the verb right-adjoins to T, or that it left adjoins and then T procliticizes to yield the TAM+V order as in (2) *ne nofo* ‘Pst stay’. This general hypothesis is illustrated in (7).



There are two key problems with this hypothesis. First, the fronted predicate in Niuean can be phrasal (Massam 2000), so it can't be claimed to

undergo head movement. A solution here would be to consider that the verb or predicate is moving to the specifier of TP (and that tense pro-cliticizes onto it). A second problem is more serious: Negation intervenes between T and the predicate. Negation can host particles (8a,b,c), so as argued in Massam (2000), it acts like a separate head, and not a prefix on V. This means that V cannot be considered to raise as high as the surface position of the TAM.

- (8) a. Kua nākai **tuai** fano a ia.
 Perf not Perf go Abs.P 3.Sg
 ‘He has not gone.’ (McEwen xviii)
- b. Ai **lā** kitia e au e pusi.
 not Emph see Erg.P 1.Sg Abs.C cat
 ‘I have not yet seen the cat.’ (Sperlich 169)
- c. Ai **kia** kitia e koe e lā kua tokoluga?
 not Q see Erg.P 2.Sg Abs.C sun Perf high
 ‘Didn’t you see the sun high up?’ (Seiter 26)

Our conclusion here is that the correct structure is [T] [NEG] [VERB] and not [T+NEG+V].

A second hypothesis might be that TAM is in the ‘usual’ T (of CP>TP>VP) so that Neg and V are lower than T. A problem here is that we know that V moves into the C domain in questions, as it moves to the left of Q, as in (6) (Massam and Starks 2008), assuming that Q is in the C-domain. But in questions too, TAM is to the left of the verb, arguing that Tense is also in the C-domain. This is seen in (10).

- | | <u>T-element</u> | <u>V</u> | <u>C-element</u> | | | |
|------|---|----------|------------------|-------|------|-------------|
| (10) | Kua | kai | nakai | e | Moka | e apala? |
| | Perf | eat | Q | Erg.P | Moka | Abs.C apple |
| | ‘Did Moka eat the apple?’ (Field Notes) | | | | | |

Our conclusion is that this second hypothesis is incorrect and that overt T is in fact relatively high in the C domain (above Q and Neg). There is supporting evidence for this in that Tense changes in the context of null operators (in relative clauses and wh-questions) to a slightly different set of TAMs, as illustrated in (11) and (12). This indicates that the TAM is affected by an operator in Comp, arguing that TAM can spell out both C and T. In addition, some complementizers, such as the factive-causal *he*, obligatorily appear without a TAM, as in (13).

(11) *Relative Clause/Wh-Q TAMs* (Seiter 1980)

	Matrix	Relative Clause
Present	NULL	ne
Past	ne	ne
Future	to	ka
Perfect	kua + tuai	ne kua
Progressive	hā ne (fā e)	ne fā e

(12) he tau tagata Niue **ne kua** nonofo i Niu Silani
 Gen.C Pl person Niuean **Perf.Rel** stay Loc.P New Zealand
 ‘(of) Niueans who live in New Zealand’ (LMR)

(13) Kua ofo a lautolu [**he** nākai kai e koe e ika]
 Perf-surprised Abs.P they Comp not eat Erg.P 2.Sg Abs.C fish
 ‘They were surprised you didn’t eat the fish.’ (Seiter 129)

A third hypothesis is that Tense is merged in the usual position, then moves to Comp, but unlike in hypothesis 1, the verb is not involved in this movement to the C domain, as the verb moves instead only to specifier of TP.

There are several advantages to this independent tense movement hypothesis. First, it allows for the possibility of a universal CP>TP structure. Second, it allows for an explanation of split tense *kua V tuai* as in (5), along the lines of Sportiche’s (1988) quantifier float analysis, where *kua* would move, and *tuai* remain in situ. And third, it allows for a cross-linguistic generalization that V must be in construction with T by some mechanism: here, via Pred movement to Spec of T (cf. Rule R, Affix Hopping, V→T, Agree).

There are also some problems with this view, though. First, T to C movement violates the Head Movement Constraint (or alternatively, does not meet conditions for Morphological Merger) due to the intervention of Neg. This might be dealt with by considering overt Neg to be in Spec of NegP, as in (36) below. Second, TAM is spread across three heads, with Tense in the middle, potentially making head movement difficult to posit. We will return to this below in 2.3, after we lay out the relevant TAM data in the next section.

The key point here is that TAM is not always a single particle, but can be a series of particles. Let us explore this further.

2.2. The TAMs

The following description of Niuean TAM is based on Seiter (1980), Sperlich (1997), and McEwen (1970). Each tense is provided, with its general meaning, followed by an example. For reasons of space, only one example is provided.

A. *Ne* PAST (simple or progressive)

- (15) **Ne** nofo a au i Makefu
 Pst live Abs.P 1.Sg Loc.P Makefu
 ‘I lived/was living at Makefu.’ (Seiter 4)

B. *Na* PAST UNCERTAIN or ONGOING TRUTH

- (16) **Na** tū fakalogologo tūmau e lā.
 Pst stand calmly always Abs.C sun
 ‘The sun always stands still.’ (i.e. the earth moves around it) (Seiter 5)

C. *NULL* PRESENT

- (17) Nofo a Maka he laulau
 sit Abs.P Maka Loc.C table
 ‘Maka’s sitting on the table.’ (Seiter 3)

D. *To* FUTURE

- (18) **To** ō a tautolu mo ia
 Fut go.Pl Abs.P 2.Pl.Incl with 3.Sg
 ‘We’ll go with him.’ (Seiter 6)

The above tenses can also be used with progressive meaning, but to emphasize the progressive nature of the event, a particular form can be used, as below.

E. *Hā ne (+fā e)* PROGRESSIVE

- (19) **Hā ne** kai a mautolu he mogonei he tau ika mo e talo
 Prog eat Abs.P 2.Pl.Excl Loc.C now Loc.C Pl fish with C taro
 ‘We are eating fish and taro right now.’ (Seiter 7)

Hā ne is often used with *fā e*, as in (20). (I ignore *e*, a linker, here.)

- (20) **Hā ne fā e** fakaata he fonua
 Prog Prog view Loc.C land
 ‘He’s viewing the land.’ (through binoculars or telescope) (Seiter 7)

The progressive can be used for present or past eventualities (not shown).

F. Kua *PERFECT* (i.e. completed event with ongoing relevance to a present, past or future reference point – Comrie 1976)

- (21) **Kua** fanogonogo a au ke he tau hūhū oti taau
 Perf listen Abs.P 1.Sg Goal Loc.C Pl question all your
 ‘I’ve already listened to all of your questions.’ (Seiter 7)

In addition, *tuai* indicates perfect, either alone or with *kua* (not with other TAMs). *Tuai* is post-verbal.

- (22) Hau **tuai** e tehina haau
 Come.Sg Perf Abs.C brother your
 ‘Your brother has come.’ (Seiter 8)

- (23) **Kua** ligi **tuai** e au e kapiniu tī ma-au
 Perf pour Perf Erg.P 1.Sg Abs.C cup tea for-you
 ‘I’ve poured a cup of tea for you.’ (Seiter 8)

Kua can be used for present tense with an implied past relevant event or state. It cannot be used for inherent, non-transitory events.

- (24) **Kua** tokoluga e lā
 Perf high Abs.C sun
 ‘The sun is high.’ (it has climbed up to noon position) (Seiter 8)

- (25) Tokoluga lahi e mata feutu (could not use *kua* here)
 high greatly Abs.C edge cliff
 ‘The top of the cliff is very high.’ (Seiter 8)

It is often used for the narrative past, alternating in this use with *ne*. *Kua* can co-occur with *na* to give an explicit past perfect, as in (26).

- (26) **Na kua** eke fenoga lā nakai a ia he tali mai
 Pst Perf do journey yet Q Abs.P 3.Sg Loc.C wait Dir
 ‘Had he ever traveled before?’ (Seiter 9)

Kua is described as: “non-future tense and present perfect tense marker with primary focus on present tense (including historical present) but with secondary scope over definitive and recent past. Generally denotes the **unmarked tense**” (Sperlich 1997). *Kua* is the TAM used most often in out of context elicitation sentences.

G. Kia *EXHORTATIVE SUBJUNCTIVE*

- (27) Kia tō lahi e uha!
 Exhrt fall greatly Abs.C rain
 ‘May it rain heavily!’ (Seiter 9)

H. NULL IMPERATIVE

- (28) Hehele aki e titipi ē e falaoa
 cut with Abs.C knife this Abs.C bread
 ‘Cut the bread with this knife!’ (Seiter 58)

Exhortative *kia* can also be used for imperatives. Negative imperatives use *ua* or *aua*, as in (29).

- (29) Ua fahi a au
 Neg.Imp hit Abs.C 1.Sg
 ‘Don’t hit me!’ (Seiter 60)

I. ā kua or ke EMBEDDED SUBJUNCTIVE

- (30) Fetamakina [ā kua mahele e mata hui he tō e toki]
 Nearly Pst.Sbjv cut Abs.C piece foot Loc.C fall Abs.C axe
 ‘His toe was nearly cut off as the axe fell.’ (Seiter 134)
- (31) Manako lahi a au [ke fano a Pita ki Niu Silani]
 want greatly Abs.P 1.Sg Sbjv go Abs.P Pita Loc.P New Zealand
 ‘I really want Pita to go to New Zealand.’ (Seiter 134)

J. he EMBEDDED CAUSE/FACTIVE

- (32) Kua ofo a lautolu [he nā kai kai e koe e ika]
 Perf surprised Abs.P 3.Pl Comp not eat Erg.P 2.Sg Abs.C fish
 ‘They were surprised you didn’t eat the fish.’ (Seiter 129)

Seiter also isolates *ko e* as a TAM meaning ‘actual present’, similar to progressive.

- (33) Ai ko e onoono a au ke he ha mena
 not Pres look Abs.P 1.Sg Goal Loc.C Nsp thing
 ‘I’m not looking at anything.’ (Seiter 82)

But the word order in (33), with *ko* after negation, demonstrates that the *ko+V* complex is in the predicate slot of the sentence, so, as Seiter himself notes, *ko e* is not in the normal position of TAM. Also, there are many examples to be found in various sources that are not present tense (Massam, Lee and Rolle 2006). Since [*ko e V*] behaves exactly like [*ko e N*], where NP is focused, I assume [*ko e V*] is a predicate focusing device and is not a member of the TAM paradigm.

2.3 The Patterns

These tenses can be viewed as in (34), where we see there are single particle, double particle, and triple particle TAM complexes. However, if we assume a consistent position for each particle, a different picture emerges, as in (35). Here

we can see the data organizes itself into three groups, generally of particles starting with “H”, with “N” and with “K”, which loosely map to complementizers, tense markers, and aspect markers. We translate this into tree structures in the next section.

(34) Complex tenses

he			<i>Fact/CausCompl</i>
ne			<i>Pst</i>
ne			<i>Realis Rel</i>
na			<i>UncertPst</i>
to			<i>Fut</i>
ka			<i>Fut Rel</i>
kua (tuai)			<i>Perf</i>
kia			<i>Exhort</i>
ke			<i>Sbjv</i>
ne		kua	<i>Perf Rel</i>
hā		ne	<i>Progl</i>
hā		kua	<i>Fact/Caus</i>
ā		kia	<i>Exhort Emb'd</i>
na		kua	<i>Pst Perf</i>
hā	ne	fā e	<i>Prog2</i>

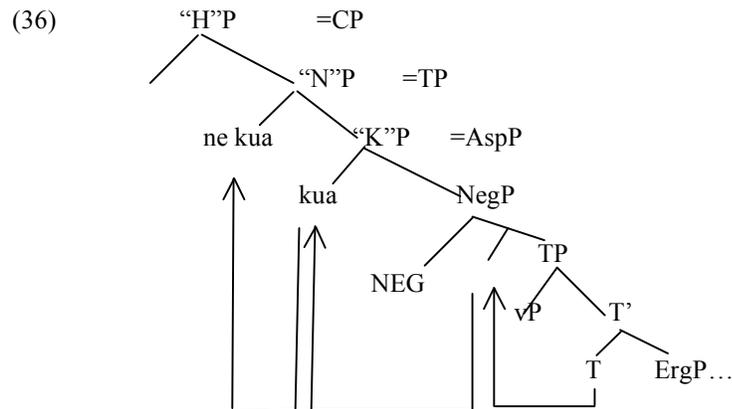
(35) Assuming a consistent slot for each morpheme

“H”	“N”	“K”	
		ka	<i>Fut Rel</i>
		kua (tuai)	<i>Perf</i>
		kia	<i>Exhort</i>
		ke	<i>Sbjv</i>
	ne		<i>Pst</i>
	ne		<i>Realis Rel</i>
	na		<i>Uncert/OngoPst</i>
	NULL		<i>Present and IMP</i>
		to	<i>Fut</i>
	ne	kua	<i>Perf Rel</i>
	na	kua	<i>Pst Perf</i>
hā	ne		<i>Progl</i>
hā	ne	fā e	<i>Prog2</i>
hā		kua	<i>Fact/Caus</i>
ā		kia	<i>Exhort Emb'd</i>
he			<i>Fact/CausCompl</i>

2.4 An Analysis

We hypothesized above that T originates in T, below C, and undergoes movement to C. A problem was identified, namely that TAM does not always consist of a single head, but can consist of a complex, as illustrated in section 2.2 and 2.3. If the TAM system encodes features from three nodes, how does T enter the C system via movement?

A possible solution emerges from the table in (35). Let us assume there are three positions in the C domain (cf. Rizzi 1997). Leftmost is the node associated with Comp, in which the “H” morphemes are merged in Niuean. Next, is the node associated with “N” elements in Niuean, akin to T, and containing an attracting feature. Below this is the node associated with “K” elements in Niuean, related to Aspect. Neg is merged below Aspect, and Tense is merged below Neg. The tense morpheme is merged in the low T, and moves to the head of Negation (the negation morpheme *nākai* is in specifier position so is unaffected by the head movements.) From Neg, T moves to left-adjoin to Aspect, then this complex moves to left-adjoin to the high T position. (This last move may not be necessary.) This derives the right order of elements, while allowing universal merge order of C and T to be maintained.



There is support for this analysis in the fact that the negative-imperative is a TAM, in other words, Neg clearly has a relation with C-domain. This is derivable in this analysis, in which the head of Neg undergoes head movement to high T, along with T and Aspect, though the details of why the head of Neg is pronounced instead of the Spec in such cases remains to be explained.

Our overall conclusion, then, to the question “Where is Tense?” is as follows. Tense is merged in a low TP, and raises to a corresponding T node in the C-domain, via head movement (with left adjunction) through Neg (if present) and Aspect. In addition, T in Niuean is like the familiar INFL, in housing an EPP feature, albeit one which triggers the fronting of the predicate rather than the subject (Massam 2000).

3. Unusual Properties of Niuean Tense

Although we have demonstrated that Tense in Niuean is merged in a familiar position, there are four ways in which Niuean tense behaves differently from tense in more familiar Indo-European languages.

3.1 Niuean tense attracts the predicate

As just mentioned, Niuean T contains an EPP feature, as English T, but it attracts the predicate to the specifier of T, rather than the highest (subject) argument. This has been discussed in other papers, and will not be addressed further here (Massam, 2000, 2001a,b etc.).

3.2 Niuean tense is not related to agreement or argument licensing

There is no overt grammatical phi agreement in Niuean (and thus arguably no covert agreement either). Nominative case availability or predication has been tied to finiteness (Cowper 2002, cf. Chomsky 1981, 1995, 2000, Hornstein 1995, Pesetsky and Torrego 2001, Rothstein 1983, Schutze 1997, among others), but in Niuean, absolutive Case is always available, in control (37), imperative (38), and in the optionality of raising (39, 40), as seen below.

- (37) Kua amaamanaki e nā tama [ke fe-tohitohi-aki
 Perf hope Abs.C pair boy Sbjv Recpr-write-Recpr
 hololoa (a laua)]
 frequently Abs.P 3.Pl
 ‘The two boys are hoping to write to each other frequently.’ (Seiter 139)
- (38) Fina age (a koe) apogipogi!
 Go+out Dir.3 Abs.P 2.Sg tomorrow
 ‘Come on out tomorrow!’ (Seiter 58)
- (39) Maeke [ke nofo a Pita i Tuapa]
 Possible Sbjv stay Abs.P Pita Loc.P Tuapa
 ‘Pita can stay at Tuapa.’ (Seiter 157)
- (40) Maeke a Pita [ke nofo ___ i Tuapa]
 Possible Abs.P Pita Sbjv stay ___ Loc.P Tuapa
 ‘Pita can stay at Tuapa.’ (Seiter 157)

Ergative Case is also always available, as seen in the optionality of subject raising shown in (41) and (42) below.

- (41) Kua kamata [ke hala he tama e akau]
 Perf begin Sbjv cut Erg.C child Abs.C tree
 ‘The child has begun to cut down the tree.’ (Seiter 158)

- (42) Kua kamata e tama [ke hala ____ e akau]
 Perf begin Abs.C child Sbjv cut ____ Abs.C tree
 ‘The child has begun to cut down the tree.’ (Seiter 158)

3.3 Niuean tense is optionally expressed

A third interesting feature of Niuean tense is that it appears to be optional, though the precise conditioning factors for this optionality are not clear. In spoken data, tense is often omitted, as in the following exchange (43), where underlined verbs appear without tense, taken from interview data from the Languages of Manukau Region (LMR) data (cf. Bell et al 2000). (For space reasons (43) is not glossed.) *ō hui* = ‘go (with plural subject) foot’, i.e. ‘walk’.

- (43) Interview Data – Niuean older woman (re: her childhood walks to school)

R: ka ko e falu tama ka ha, *ō* ni ti liliu mai ke he tau maaga mooli ha lautolu he aho

R: [but some children though, went and came back to their own villages during the day]

Q: e

Q: [yes]

R: *ō hui* ni ti liliu mai

R: [just walked and come back]

Q: mamao koa ka ha!..

Q: [very far though!..]

...

Q: ō hui ni kia?

Q: [just walked?]

R: *ō hui* ni he mogo pogipogi to liliu mai he mogo afiafi ka hili e aoga, pihia na pogi

R: [walked in the morning time and came back in the evening time after school, same tomorrow]

...

R: **na ala** ka ha ke *ō* tuai

R: [woke to go early though]

R: *ō* tuai early in the morning

R: [went early, early in the morning]

Note that in several cases the verb has no preceding past tense TAM, but the past TAM *na* (in bold) is used in the second-to-final utterance above, indicating that there is variation in whether or not an overt TAM is used.

In formal written contexts also, we find Tense drop, as in the following example (44), from a book of the history of Niue. Note that in the same story, a little later on, a TAM is used (45), again, showing variation in use of TAMs.

- (44) Uta e ia e tau laukou ia fakatatai aki e
take Erg.P 3.Sg Abs.C Pl leaf Dem compare=with Abs.C
tau laukou ne pakupaku he lā
Pl leaf Realis dry Loc.C sun
‘He took the leaves and compared them with those that were dried in the sun.’ (*Niue: A History*)
- (45) Ne fano a ia mo e huo hake e fu-kaho ti
Pst go Abs.P 3.Sg and C pull up Abs.C bamboo then
mui hifo ke he matua ki Lalo-fona.
follow down Loc.C Goal.C parent Goal.P Lalo-fona.
‘He went and pulled up the bamboo and followed his father down to Lalofonua.’ (*Niue: A History*)

3.4 Niuean tense is sometimes obligatorily null

As mentioned above, in some contexts Niuean tense is obligatorily not expressed, such as in regular present tense sentences (17), in sentences with focus clefted, or Wh nominals (46), and in embedded clauses with the factive-causal complementizer *he* (32).

- (46) ko hai ne tala atu ki a koe ke hau?
Pred who Realis tell Dir.2 Goal Pers 2.Sg Sbjv come
‘Who told you to come?’ (Sperlich)

4. Is Niuean tense INFL?

Given the unusual behaviour of Niuean tense, we might ask if it serves the function of INFL, that is, serves as head of the sentence. INFL is considered by Ritter and Wiltschko (to appear, in prep) to have the following properties. The value of these properties for Niuean tense is shown on the right of each property. We can see that tense can be considered to function as INFL in Niuean.

(47) INFL: (from Ritter and Wiltschko to appear, in prep)

- | | |
|--|-----|
| • functions to anchor the reported eventuality to the utterance | YES |
| • is unique (not recursive, unlike modifiers) | YES |
| • is syntactically obligatory, therefore: | YES |
| • can be an expletive | NO |
| • can be null in contexts (visible by its necessity) | YES |
| • has a relation with Comp | YES |
| • need not encode tense: locative/person (Halkomelem, Blackfoot) | N/A |

5. Spelling out Tense

Remaining to account for is which TAM particles are pronounced in the various contexts. For example, note that if Aspect appears, Tense does not (e.g. (5))

(48) Pronunciation Rules (informal): (Refer to Table (35))

Assumptions: Tense is always present in the tree, Future *to* is in Aspect. Tense is Realis/Irrealis. Irrealis tense is *always* null (Fut, Sbjv, Exhort.)

- If Aspect is valued, do not pronounce Tense (*ka, kua, kia, ke, to*)
- If Aspect is unvalued, pronounce Tense (*ne, na*)
- If Comp is strong (null OP, complementizer), pronounce tense (and aspect) (OP *IRR ka, OP ne kua, OP ne, hā ne, hā ne fā e*)
- Marked tense (*na*) is always pronounced. (*na, na kua*)

This leaves *a kia, he, hā kua* and imperatives to be accounted for. In these cases, we can consider Tense to be set at minus, hence not pronounced. This also explains the special form of negative for imperatives. Present tense remains a problem as we have not explained why it is null in non-relative contexts.

These assumptions and generalizations yield the correct surface forms of TAMs in (35), with the remaining problem of present tense, as noted.

Although much work remains to be done, we can outline the following properties of Niuean tense. Niuean tense functions like INFL and has a crucial relationship with Comp (Pesetsky and Torrego 2001, Ritter and Wiltschko, to appear, in prep.). It merges in the normal T position, below C. It is implicated in EPP predication, and has an attract relation with the verb. It thus displays the hallmarks of Tense. On the other hand, its EPP feature is predicative rather than being [D], it obligatorily undergoes head movement to COMP, via Neg and Aspect, and it is not involved in argument licensing. In addition, there are language particular spell-out rules affecting the complex that ends up in C (C+T+Asp+Neg). And finally, there are very interesting patterns of Tense-drop, within discourse which remain to be fully described. Niuean tense thus exhibits both cross-linguistically expected and unexpected patterns of behaviour.

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