
Abstract

To this day, so-called avertivity (or frustrativity) remains a relatively understudied grammatical category. The chapter aims at providing a typological overview of avertive structures based on a sample of seventeen Australian Indigenous languages, from which several distinct developmental paths can be determined for avertive meanings in Australia. Its main linguistic contribution is to establish the existence of a recurrent cluster of overlapping irrealis past meanings in these languages, as well as the complex nature of avertive meanings—which combine a negative past event meaning with a past modal meaning. The chapter can also appeal to philosophers in that it demonstrates the existence of an ontological continuum between positive and negative events and illustrates how modality, as a subjective domain, can inform our perception and representation of the flow of events.

Keywords

Australian Indigenous languages; avertivity; frustrativity; irrealis; negative events; modality

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Avertive/frustrative markers in Australian languages

Blurring the boundaries between aspectuo-temporal and modal meanings

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6.1 Introduction

This chapter will be primarily concerned with what languages can tell us about the way the human mind can conceive of time, in the broadest possible sense; it is, to a large extent, a modest attempt at providing a linguist's insight into a crosslinguistically understudied category, and at drawing some conclusions for a general theory of time, at the cognitive and social level, which, I believe, are legitimate objects for a philosopher's study of temporality.¹ Philosophically

¹ I would like to thank Kasia M. Jaszczolt, Dan Everett, and David Felipe Guerrero-Beltrán for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this chapter, as well as comments and suggestions from the audience of the *Human Time* workshop. I would

speaking, I do not intend to commit myself to a very specific view of what kind of model we should assume in order to account for the general properties of time. I will merely consider that time essentially consists of the totality of temporal relations between the events constituting the history of our world—a now fairly ancient idea pioneered by Leibniz, but also elaborated upon by Einstein, Whitehead (Whitehead 1929), and of course Russell (Russell 1936) and Wiener (Wiener 1914)—the two latter contributions being of particular importance in the formal semantic linguistic community, especially after Kamp’s re-formulation of the so-called *Russel–Wiener construction* in his seminal 1979 paper (Kamp 1979). In addition to this, and following the Davidsonian tradition in formal semantics, I will assume that events are legitimate semantic referents, i.e., can constitute individuals—albeit of a slightly abstract kind—in a model theoretic semantics, or discourse referents, if one resorts to some Kamp-style discourse semantics. Under this fairly common conception, the flow of (linguistic) time essentially boils down to a flow of events. The vast majority of descriptive, theoretical, formal, and typological works dedicated to the study of this horrendously complicated issue, tend to concentrate on actual, ‘positive’ events—i.e., events which effectively took place, as in (1). And the temporal begins to border on the modal when we turn our attention to events that are, or were, in the process of taking place, as is the case with the English progressive, (2); these can be only partially actual, as is well-known from Dowty’s (1979) imperfective paradox. Several seminal theoretical accounts of the progressive resorted to evidently modal possible-world concepts to handle such forms, from Dowty’s (1979) inertia-based theory, to Landman’s (Landman 1992) stage-based theory. Event descriptions in the progressive have a foot in the actual world, and another foot in a yet underdetermined possible

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future (relatively to whatever counts as the topic/reference time à la Reichenbach (1947) (see also Klein 1994)). On the other hand, counterfactuals have been unquestionably and overwhelmingly treated as purely modal forms, referring to inaccessible worlds, with little or no connection with ‘actual’ events such as those denoted by (1), and even (2)—note that these are well-known for having a negative dimension of meaning as well, and (2) clearly entails that the subject did not leave said alley; the question of the negativity of past counterfactuals/past irrealises has already attracted considerable attention, both within (Verstraete 2006; Van Linden and Verstraete 2008) and without the Australianist tradition, including among formal semanticists/philosophers of language (cf. e.g. Ippolito 2003, 2006; Arregui 2007, 2009).² But the simplest and most common type of inactual events are of course negative (past) events such as (4).

(1) John came early this morning.

(2) Mary was crossing the lawn.

(3) We should have left after two years of a broken security light in the alley (...). (*The Guardian*, 2/12/2014)

² The exact nature of the negative content of counterfactuals has been much debated in the literature. Some works claim that it is a mere defeasible implicature, others that it is a matter of entailment, or of presupposition—see Ippolito (2003) vs Arregui (2007)—and many have no definite stance on the topic (e.g. Verstraete 2005, 2006). I will argue below that past in Australian languages needs to be discussed form per form, language per language.

(4) Max didn't go.

This chapter will focus on a hitherto relatively understudied type of events, contributed by so-called *avertive* or *frustrative* forms. These, I will claim, happen to suggest that there is, in fact, more a continuum than a gap between actual and inactual/counterfactual events, and that frustratives/avertives denote *complex event structures*, i.e. more than one event variable (and more than one event predicate). As a first approximation, the relevant meaning of so-called avertive³ and frustrative forms can be best paraphrased as ‘Subject nearly/almost V-ed/ Subject was going to V-ed [but didn't]’, cf. (5)–(7)—as we will see, these meanings are rarely exclusive, and these markers tend to exhibit substantial polyfunctionality.

(5) Kosa K hau + re + hine (Hua)⁴

³ Note that the label *avertive* is also used in some works to refer to so-called ‘apprehensionals’, ‘timitives’, or ‘aversives’, i.e. structures used to convey that some undesirable event is imminent. While a single form can sometimes have both an apprehensional and an avertive/frustrative meaning, the two semantic categories should not be confused. Cf. e.g. [Vuillermet \(2018\)](#), [Smith-Dennis \(2021\)](#), [AnderBois and Dąbkowski \(2021\)](#).

⁴ List of abbreviations: 1/2/3: 1st/2nd/3rd person; I, II, III, IV, V...: lexical classes (mostly noun classes); >: syntactic hierarchy of pronouns (e.g.: 1sg>3sg: 1sg subject, 3sg object); A: transitive subject; ABL: ablative; ABS: absolutive case; ACC: accusative; ACT: ‘actual’ inflection (Kayardild); ADV: adverbializer; ANT: anterior inflection (Iwaidja); APPL: applicative (Tepehuan); Aug: augmented number; aux: auxiliary; AVERT: avertive; ben: beneficiary; C: complementizing (Kayardild); Card: cardinal pronoun; CAUS: causative conjugation class marker; CHAR: characteristic verb suffix (Yankunytjatjara); CLF:ANIM: noun classifier, animates; CMP: completive; CNJ: conjunctive (person); Con: contemporary tense (Gurr-Goni); CONJ: conjunction; CONT: continuative; CONTR: contrastive; CTRFAC: counterfactual/irrealis particle; DAT: dative; DEM: demonstrative; DEPR: depreciative; DET: determiner; DIR: directional; DIST: distal; DUR: durative; EMPH: emphatic marker; ERG: ergative case; EXP: ‘expectation’ verbal suffix (Nyikina); F/f: feminine; FOC: focus marker; FRUS: frustrative particle; FRUST: frustrative

fall 2s.o. happen PERF.3 CTRFAC

‘You almost fell.’ (Haiman 1980: 160)

(6) maju ngan-ambija-na (Iwaidja)

VOL 1sg.PCF-laugh-PCF

‘I was going to laugh (but I didn’t)’ (Pym and Larrimore 1979: 76)

inflection/particle in periphrastic inflection; FUT: future (present irrealis inflection); GEN: Nonmasculine gender (i.e. any gender but Masculine) (Mawng); h: higher object; HAB: habitual tense; HOR: hortative inflection; LOAN: transitive loan verb marker (Yankunytjatjara); LOC: locative; IMPF: past imperfective; INCEP: inceptive reduplication; INCH: inchoative conjugation class marker; IMP: imperative; INF: infinitive; INSTR: instrumental; INT: interrogative pronoun; INT_{PS}: introspective verbal suffix (Nyikina); INTENT: volitional inflection; INT.NR: non-realized intention (Tepehuan); IN.VAIN: avertive particle; IPFV: imperfective affixation (Russian); ITER: iterative/pluractional; M/m: masculine pronoun; MA: masculine gender agreement; Min: minimal number; MOD: modal inflection; NEG: negation; NEG.SEEM: negative evidential-avertive particle; NEUT: neutral; NF: non-future; nf: non-feminine (Gurr-Goni); nmin: non-minimal person grouping verbal prefix (Nyikina); NOM: nominative (Kayardild); NPST: non-past; nsg: non-singular pronoun; O: transitive object; OBL: oblique (indirect pronoun/agreement); P: past (Bininj Gun-wok); PART: particle; PCF: past irrealis inflection (Iwaidja); PERF: perfect; PFV: past perfective; Pre: precontemporary tense (Gurr-Goni); pl: plural; POT: potential (present irrealis inflection); PROX: proximal; PROX.SER: proximal seriated; PP: past participle; PR: present; PRIV: privative; PRO: pronoun; PROP: proprietive case; PST: past inflection; PURP: purposive inflection; RED: reduplication marker; S: intransitive subject; SENS: sensorial (Tepehuan); sg: singular; SS: adverbial, same subject (South Conchucos Quechua); SUBJ: subject; TR(LC): limited control transitivizer; TRM: clause type marker (non-negative, non-interrogative); TRY: failed attempt particle (Ngarla); USP: underspecified past inflection; VEG: ‘vegetable’ gender; VOL: volitional/irrealis particle

(7) Il a voulu partir. (French)

He have-PR.3sg want-PP leave-INF.

‘He tried to leave [and failed]’.

The chapter will demonstrate that Australian languages abound with (often multiple) grammatical avertive patterns, making it a choice category in their grammatical inventory of meanings to describe the world, or at least that they are a much more prominent category than is the case in say, so-called ‘Standard Average European’ (SAE languages) (in the Whorfian sense, see [Haspelmath 2001](#))—on a par with e.g., Amazonian languages ([Overall 2017](#)). I will speculate that such typological discrepancies, and this striking property of Australian languages, suggest that the linguistic construal of time should also be envisioned as rife with disappointments and failures connecting speakers and addressees, effectively driven by shared or interpersonal representations of expectations (including those of other people), plans and desires, rather than mere causo-temporal ordering (even if it is subjectively reconstructed via e.g. deixis-related mechanisms). Such a construal of time potentially overlaps with modality in significant ways: in other words, I will suggest that time in language, and the cognitive categories underlying the interaction between time and the mind, should be seen as more *interactional*, in a rich social sense, than is generally the case in existing linguistic works informed by well-known phenomena in SAE languages.

The bulk of this chapter will be dedicated to investigating exactly which semantic and pragmatic mechanisms underlie avertives in Australian languages, by conducting a detailed survey of avertive structures in a limited, but significant language sample. It will focus on how avertivity is grammaticalized and/or lexicalized in a number of Australian Indigenous languages (i.e. realized as elements of the grammatical or lexical inventory of a given language), or a pragmatic matter; as we will see, Australian languages stand out by the overabundance of grammatical forms conveying avertivity (as opposed to verbs or constructions, as frequently found in e.g. European languages, cf. French verb *faillir* (‘nearly.v + INF’), or English *nearly/almost* + v constructions, etc., which point to a lexical encoding of avertivity). It is my hope that by construing a general, abstract semantic/pragmatic characterization of this category in

Australian languages, much will be revealed about the connection between positive events, negative events, and how the mind tackles the flow of events, both individually, and through inter-personal, mixed modalo-aspectuo-temporal representations of time—and not purely aspectuo-temporal representations of time. For philosophers, the main interest of this chapter lies in the way it will reveal the variety and complexity of modal and temporal concepts underpinning a rather unusual category of time in Australian languages, and how this might shed novel light on the strong connection between social interactions and metaphysical considerations in the human mind; avertivity, it will be claimed, is a category reflecting on a deep conceptualization of how the flow of events can impact individuals in social interaction, as it is a decidedly interpersonal category, notably involving the notions of volitionality or (subjective) expectation as one of its key ingredients.

6.2 Existing accounts and preliminary theoretical elements

But before embarking on a survey of avertivity in Australian languages, let me briefly review past descriptive works where occurrences of this category were identified in a number of languages (both within and without Australia), as well as prior theoretical proposals, either bearing on language-specific avertive structures, or with a comparative/typological scope.

6.2.1 A quick typological overview

Avertive/frustrative particles were identified at least as early as the 1960s,^{5,6} notably in Uto-Aztecan languages, cf. the /ʔas/ particle in Hopi (Voegelin and Voegelin 1969) and the /čim/ particle in Papago (Tohono O’odham) (Hale 1969). Indigenous languages of the Americas in general immediately come to mind when studying frustratives/avertives, as it

⁵ While Hale (1969) and Voegelin and Voegelin (1969) constitute the first semantic analyses of the category that I am aware of, relevant datapoints predating these papers can be found in some descriptive grammars, for instance in Whiteley (1960: 63).

⁶ Avertivity is therefore a recent category; this, combined with its lesser grammatical prominence in well-described Western European languages, probably accounts for its being understudied.

is a well-known category in many language families spoken in this part of the world (cf. [Aikhenvald 2012](#): 185; [Campbell 2012](#): 291), with [Overall \(2017\)](#) offering the first in-depth, areal-typological study of averitivity in Amazonian languages. In addition to Amazonian and Uto-Aztecan (cf. also [Chávez 2003](#); [Copley 2005](#); [Copley and Harley 2014](#); [García Salido 2014](#): 295–296), one should mention Yuman–Cochimí ([Hardy and Gordon 1980](#)), Salish languages ([Bar-el 2005](#); [Davis and Matthewson 2016](#)) and Quechuan languages ([Hintz 2011](#)), among others.⁷

Inflectional and lexico-grammatical avertives were also identified as specific categories in Australian languages as early as the 1970s, notably in Rembarrnga (non-Pama-Nyungan/Maningrida) ([McKay 1975](#)) and Iwaidja (non-Pama-Nyungan/Iwaidjan) ([Pym and Larrimore 1979](#)). While mentioned in a large number of grammatical descriptions, avertives/frustratives in Australian languages have so far not been studied per se.

Avertives/frustratives thus seem to have been first treated as a distinct grammatical category in Indigenous languages of the Americas and of Australia; and they have also been subsequently identified in numerous other linguistic areas and phyla of the globe. For instance, the term ‘proximative’ has sometimes been used to refer to what are, in fact, categories in African languages functionally overlapping with avertives (i.e. possessing both proximative and avertive meanings), especially in Niger-Congo and Nilo-Saharan languages (cf. e.g. [Heine 1994](#); [Kuteva 1998](#); [Kuteva 2000b](#); [Heine and Kuteva 2002](#)). As was noted in [Alexandrova \(2016\)](#), proximatives are an almost universal means of conveying avertive-like meanings, cf. e.g. (8)—these constitute instances of what [Malchukov \(2004\)](#) calls ‘adversative’ structures.⁸

⁷ And possibly many more—this list is by no means exhaustive; see e.g.: [https://sails.clld.org/parameters/TAME2-](https://sails.clld.org/parameters/TAME2-13#5/1.746/289.565)

13#5/1.746/289.565

⁸ The identification of recurrent development paths connecting proximatives to avertives dates back at least to [Kuteva \(1998\)](#).

See also [Kuteva \(2001\)](#): 75ff.); [Heine and Kuteva \(2002\)](#): 94, 132, 206, 214, 215, 309, 310) and [Vafaeian \(2018\)](#): 17) for more on this, as well as e.g. [Korn and Nevskaya \(2017\)](#).

(8) He was about to leave, but he changed his mind.

Austronesian languages should be added to our list, as past works have identified a number of avertive grams (see [Kroeger 2017](#) for a discussion of some relevant references, plus e.g. [Foley 1991](#): 263–264 for a Papuan avertive, and [Lichtenberk 2008](#): 170–171 for an Oceanic avertive). In Sino-Tibetan languages, although the category remains relatively understudied, conventionalized avertive structures were identified too, cf. e.g. [Kuteva \(1998\)](#): 126).

Numerous grammatical instances of the category have also been identified for Slavic and Baltic languages since at least [Kuteva \(1998\)](#) (cf. e.g. [Kuteva 2000a](#); [Plungian 2001](#); [Erelt and Metslang 2009](#); [Alexandrova 2016](#); [Arkadiev 2019](#)). Somewhat like in African languages, the label ‘proximative’ is used in some of these works (see [Plungian 2005](#): 135) to refer to functionally overlapping forms,⁹ and [Plungian’s \(2001\)](#) concept of antiresultative seems to refer to a special subset of avertives. Finally, the category has been identified in Uralic ([Kuteva 2000a](#); [Kehayov and Siegl 2006](#): 89; [Kozlov 2019](#)), Caucasian ([Chumakina 2013](#)), Turkic ([Tatevosov 2008](#); [Tatevosov and Ivanov 2009](#); [Korn and Nevskaya 2017](#)), Indo-Iranian ([Vafaeian 2018](#)), and Romance languages (e.g. Galician and Portuguese ([Kuteva 2001](#): 79–80, [Schwellenbach 2019](#), [Sinner and Dowah 2020](#)), French ([Caudal 2020a](#)), but also Romanian ([Cosieriu 1976](#): 104).

From this short typological literature review, it should be clear that avertives are a pervasive type of gram (even though it has so far received limited attention)—so pervasive in fact, that it must be a cognitively salient manner of referring to the flow of events in language, and one we need to consider. Grams referring to more mundane ‘actual’ events are not the only grams worthy of theoretical attentions when it comes to studying time.

6.2.2 The aspectual dimension of avertives

⁹ As noted in [Kuteva et al. \(2019\)](#): 859), [Plungian’s \(2001\)](#) notion of proximatives refers to uncontrollable processes not reaching their terminus—i.e. to non-controlled avertives in my terminology.

Basing their analysis on an undefined typological sample, [Kuteva et al. \(2019\)](#): 852) argue that avertive grams can generally receive at least a subset of the following aspectual nuances:

- a) apprehensional—non-realization of undesirable verb situation;
- b) avertive—non-realization of an imminent, past verb situation where the verb situation is averted as a whole;
- c) frustrated initiation—non-realization of initial stage of past verb situation;
- d) frustrated completion—non-realization of completion of past verb situation;
- e) inconsequential—non-realization of expected result/resultant state of past verb situation.

I will here put aside apprehensionals (a) as a distinct category, and will adopt a relatively classic macro-structural event structure theory à la [Smith \(1991\)](#) and [Kamp and Reyle \(1993\)](#), whereby event macro-structure is lexically determined for each verb reading, and can comprise up to three different types of event stages: preparatory stages (found with certain achievement verb readings), inner stages (found for all types of events) and result stages (found with all change-of-state verbs, i.e. telic verbs, semelfactive verbs, so-called degree achievement verbs, and possibly associated with dynamic, subject-controlled activity verbs as well).¹⁰ [Kuteva et al.](#)'s above aspectual typology of avertive can be recast as follows, using such a macro-structural theory of aspect:

1. Full event structure avertive reading (no stage of the macro-structure is even partially realized—only some kind of expectation, or desire, holds).
2. Preparatory stage avertive reading (the event is prevented from developing further than its preparatory stage; the attempt made is somehow external to the core meaning of the event predicate conveyed by the verb).
3. Inner stage avertive reading (the event inner stage—typically the process stage of an accomplishment or a bounded degree achievement—stopped developing prior to its completion/terminus).

¹⁰ See [Caudal \(2005\)](#), [2011](#)) for a formal implementation of such a theory.

4. Result stage avertive reading (the event did not achieve the lexically encoded, expected results, *or* achieved additional, unwelcome results ‘marring’ the expected results, *or* the expected results were achieved but turned out to be unstable and did not hold for long).

It seems that a fair number of avertive markers leave it to additional parameters to determine which of these readings should prevail, in particular the actional and event structural (Aktionsart) properties of the utterance marked with the avertive gram—e.g., depending on contextual parameters, achievement utterances can give rise to either readings 1 or 2. In effect, readings 1 and 2 can be difficult to distinguish with such utterances; subject control plays an important part in this respect. If an attempt at realizing an event is clearly made by some controlling subject (usually an animate entity), then a preparatory stage event can be a delicate issue. Thus, (9) can be uttered in a context where it became obvious that the subject was getting ready to leave—a pure verbal interaction does not suffice to warrant an avertive interpretation (it is then a straightforward past desire); it takes some active preparation, or some kind of an outgoing motion, for reading 2 to prevail. In contrast, when the *faillir* avertive construction is used (9), then no deliberate attempt event takes place, and only reading 1 can hold.

(9) Il	a	failli	partir.	(French)
PRO.3sg	have.PR.3sg	nearly.do.PP	leave-INF.	
‘He almost/nearly left.’				

The Tohono O’odham avertive particle *cem* has been claimed to be able to combine with overt grammatical marking so as to distinguish between aspectual readings 1–2 (10) vs 2 (11) vs 4 (12) (Copley 2007: 27; Copley and Harley 2014: 144). Note that no clear example of reading 3 was found in either Copley (2007), Copley and Harley (2014), or Hale (1969).

(10)	Huan	‘at	o	cem	kukpi’ok	g	pualt.	(Tohono O’odham)
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Juan aux.PERF FUT FRUS open DET door

unachieved-goal: 'Juan tried to/was going to open the door.'

(He tripped before he got there / tugged on the door but failed to open it)

(11) Huan 'o cem kukpi'ok g pualt.

Juan aux.IMPF FRUS open DET door

unachieved-goal: 'Juan tried to open the door.'

(He pulled but couldn't get it open)

(12) Huan 'at cem ku:pi'o g pualt.

Juan aux.PERF FRUS open DET door

'Juan opened the door in vain.'

Non-continuation: Juan got the door open but it didn't stay open

unachieved-goal: The door's being open didn't have the desired effect

Several languages have been claimed to offer grams specializing in one of the above readings,¹¹ as e.g. the *-axa* frustrative suffix in Ese Eija, which is argued to have such a semantics in [Vuillermet \(2012\)](#), cf. (13).

¹¹ Cf. [Vuillermet \(2012\)](#): 491): 'The frustrative morpheme -'axa specifies that an event is carried out, but the effect/result expected by the person who performs the event is not reached.'

(13) [Context: speaker tried to kill a viper by cutting off its head; at first it seemed dead, but then it suddenly came back to life and slithered away]

Majoya eyaa oya ekwe=baa=a (Ese Eija)

then 1sg.ERG 3ABS 1sg.GEN=machete=INSTR

sapa-jaja-wexa-jya-'axa-naje.

head-cut-open-DEPR-FRUST-PST

'Then I tried to cut its head off with my machete (*lit. I head-cut-off it*).'[\(Vuillermet 2012: 491–492\)](#)

But this semantic characterization seems a little bit too strong, as the form can also convey full event avertives (reading 1), as in (14).

(14) [Context: dog tried to get the honey, but he is too short] (Ese Eija)

Ojaya iñawewa wini=jo=pi'ai sowa-'axa-ki-ani.

3ERG dog honey=LOC=ALSO go_up-FRUST-GO_TO_DO-PRS

'The dog wanted to go up to (reach) the honey.'[\(Vuillermet 2012: 492\)](#)

Similarly, it is not clear that the so-called 'inconsequential' frustrative in Hua ([Haiman 1988](#)) (after which [Kuteva et al. \(2019\): 874 ff.](#)) named reading 4) only conveys result stage avertive readings. It should be noted that the notion of inconsequential readings probably dates back to [Plungian's \(2001\)](#) concept of antiresultativity, which—broadly—corresponds to the notion of avertivity as defined here (especially as a 'reversal of expectations'; see also [Malchukov \(2004\): 194](#) and [Overall \(2017\)](#)). Plungian observes that antiresultative meanings can follow from unrealized or unstable result states (i.e. some result state was nullified by some contextual factor).

The monofunctionality vs polyfunctionality of averitive structures appears therefore to be a very delicate, and most likely form-specific issue. As we will see, Australian averitives/frustratives also offer some amount of variation; the interpretation of an averitive form will notably depend on the verb's actional (esp. subject control) and aspectual features, and broadly contextual parameters possibly influencing such features, including whether or not result states hold/are nullified, etc.

6.2.3 The modal dimension of averitives

In addition to the above aspectual partition, [Kuteva \(1998, 2001\)](#) and [Kuteva et al. \(2019\)](#) offered a foundational account of averitives in terms of grammaticalization theory and development paths; a more substantial (though far from sufficient) inventory of lexical sources for averitives can be found in [Heine and Kuteva \(2002\)](#). Both stressed the importance of the modal (or aspect-modal) dimension of averitives, as one of the best studied and most common development pathways leading to this category involves volitional lexical elements or grams, and/or proximative¹² lexical elements or grams—cf. [Kuteva \(1998, 2001\)](#),¹³ who first proposed that volitional grams commonly develop into proximatives, and from there into past counterfactuals, and finally averitives, as in (15).

(15) Past Volitional > Past Proximative/Future in the past > (Past) counterfactual > Averitive ([Kuteva 2001](#): 139)

A construction like (7) suggests that shorter, more straightforward lexification paths may exist, as in (16). As we will see, some Australian languages also provide evidence for another, shorter development path as in (17), albeit of a branching kind (see [Kuteva 1998](#): 145).

¹² Proximatives, which convey 'imminent future' meanings, largely overlap with progressives, and like them, can be regarded as equally modal and aspectual (i.e., they convey so-called 'prospective aspect', cf. e.g. [Sansò 2020](#)).

¹³ See [Arkadijev \(2020\)](#) for specific hypotheses concerning the development path of the Lithuanian averitive.

(16) Past volition > Past Avertive

(17) Past volition > Past Avertive

> Future in the Past / Past Proximative > Past Counterfactual

In addition to the above grammaticalization or lexicalization-based analyses, specific avertive grams or lexico-functional items have been the object of synchronic, partially formal modal analyses. [Copley \(2005\)](#) and [Copley and Harley \(2014\)](#) are probably the most extended works of that type. They share with [Carol and Salanova \(2017\)](#) an account inspired by [Dowty's \(1979\)](#) notion of inertia,¹⁴ but these two (partial) implementations diverge with respect to the underlying concepts and machinery: Copley and Harley resort to their force-dynamics account which eschews possible worlds (and even explicitly claim they should not be involved in the analysis of the Papago particle /čim/), while Carol and Salanova opt for a more mundane 'event inertia' semantics approach to avertives in Chorote and Měbêngôkre, borrowing [Landman's \(1992\)](#) formal rendering of Dowty's notion of inertia as stages, *via* [Arregui, Rivero, and Salanova \(2014\)](#). In contrast to the two inertia-inspired accounts I have just mentioned, [Kuteva et al. \(2019\)](#) and [O'Hagan \(2018\)](#) opt for a non-formal, purely aspectual account. [O'Hagan \(2018\)](#) observes that telic and

¹⁴ [Dowty \(1979\)](#):148) defines inertia worlds as worlds that 'are to be thought of as worlds which are exactly like the given world up to the time in question and in which the future course of events after this time develops in ways most compatible with the past course of events'. This captures the intuition that a proposition denoted by an utterance in the progressive could be true at a world *w* and interval *I* even if the corresponding event did not culminate at *w* but culminated at every inertia world given by *I*, *w*.

atelic verbs do not pattern similarly with the Caquite frustrative constructions involving a verbal suffix (*-be*) and/or a clitic (=me); his account is otherwise essentially identical to [Kuteva et al. \(2019\)](#).

I will advocate for a more complex, and hybrid TA/M account of Australian avertives (i.e. possessing both an aspectuo-temporal and a modal dimension), essentially proposing that semanticized avertive structures (not adversative utterances based on simple proximatives) in these languages (i) have a clear negative event meaning and are sensitive to Aktionsart parameters (ii) involve an underlying modal component of meaning—often related to volition or beliefs/expectations, more rarely to capacity—and (iv) are semantically complex expressions. This is obviously distinct from [Copley and Harley’s \(2014\)](#): 140) proposal that one should not introduce a plan modal in the denotation of Papago/Tohono O’odham avertive *cem*. Their key argument is that *cem* also possesses so-called ‘decessive’, ‘non-continuation’ past readings (cf. English *used to*; see [Hale \(1969\)](#): 211) and (18)).

(18)	‘O’ohona	‘o	cem	suam	(Tohono O’odham)
	Sign	aux-IMPF	FRUST	yellow.	
	‘The sign was yellow / used to be yellow’. (Copley 2007)				

Such an objection cannot hold for Australian avertives though, as they are deprived of similar temporal readings with statives, and exhibit distinctly modal readings.¹⁵

¹⁵ I would also like to point out that Copley and Harvey’s argument tacitly rests upon the assumption that a monosemous account for *cem* is desirable. However, such an assumption is seldom warranted for TAM categories, as soon as we have access to diachronic data—diachrony generally forces us to abandon monosemous approaches to the vast majority of TAM categories, whether inflectional or not, when their meanings appear to substantially vary with time, and when they become polyfunctional; see ([Caudal 2018a](#)) for an extended discussion. It could well be, in fact, that *cem* triggers different conventionalized readings with different aspectual types, and that its ‘decessive’ and ‘avertive’ readings are separate

Last but not least, before turning to the areal typological part of my investigation, I should mention two additional hypotheses I will be making.

- (i) Following [Clendon \(2014\)](#), I will consider avertivity to subsume frustrativity, in the sense that I regard avertives to fall into two wide subclasses with respect to actionality and argument structure, namely *non-controlled avertives* vs. *controlled avertives*—the latter corresponding to frustratives. In other words, only controlled-avertives can give rise to paraphrases or translations using ‘try’ verbs—in contrast, proximative adverbials (‘nearly’, ‘almost’) as well as lexico-grammatical/grammatical proximative markers (‘be-PST going to’, ‘be-PST on the verge of’, etc.) can be used to paraphrase, or translate, both SC and NSC avertives, depending on contextual factors. In the remainder of this chapter, I will therefore only refer to the relevant markers as avertives.
- (ii) So-called ‘non-culminating accomplishments’ were first identified for Salish languages in ([Bar-El 2005](#); [Bar-El et al. 2006](#)), cf. (19). Similar data points were then identified and studied across many languages e.g. Turkic, Caucasian, Finno-Ugric ([Tatevosov 2008](#), [2020](#)), Indo-Iranian ([Arunachalam and Kothari 2010](#), [2011](#)), Slavic ([Altshuler 2014](#); [Filip 2017](#)), Papuan ([Kroeger 2017](#)), Germanic/Romance ([Martin and Schäfer 2012](#), [2017](#)), Sino-Tibetan ([Koenig and Chief 2008](#)), Kra-Drai ([Koenig and Muansuwan 2000](#)), Uto-Aztecan ([Copley and Harley 2014](#)), Austronesian ([Paul, Ralalaoherivony, and Swart 2020](#); cf. e.g. [Martin and](#)

conventionalized readings. For an instance of such an analysis, see ([Caudal 2020b](#))’s treatment of inchoative readings of the stative verbs in the *passé simple* or *passé composé* resorting to ([Asher 2011](#))’s notion of *dependent type coercion* (where so-called ‘bridging functions’ can be treated as conventionalized, extended meanings—it could even be that the avertive readings of *cem* are, in fact, the innovative, layered meanings ([Hopper 1991](#))). Non-monosemous analyses are, generally speaking, better suited to the intricacies of language change, and probably more ‘realistic’ from that point of view than monosemous analyses. And the development of aspectual-type triggered conventionalized meanings, seem to be common in the evolution of TAM categories.

Demirdache (2020) for a review of the existing literature. They constitute instances of what I will call ‘partitive culminations’ (PCs).

(19)	chen	ilhen	kwi	skawts welh	haw	(Skwxwú7mesh)
	1s.sg	eat	DET	potato CONJ	NEG	
	k-an	i	huy-nexw			
	IRR-1sg.CNJ	PART	finish-TR(LC)			

‘I ate a potato but never finished it.’ (Bar-el 2005: 82)

PCs will be regarded as a type of avertive strategy—in line with e.g. Salish facts exposed in (Davis and Matthewson 2016). In a sense, I will therefore both follow, and depart from (Kroeger 2017), who argued against the possibility of treating PCs and avertive grams on a par (Kroeger specifically rejected Copley and Harley’s unified analysis of PCs and avertives in Tohono O’odham; my position, as we will see, is somewhat intermediary).

6.3 Avertivity in Australian languages: An areal typological pilot study

Let us now move to the central object of the present study, namely avertivity in Australian languages. I will here offer a tentative overview of their avertive systems, based on a small sample of languages, especially non-Pama-Nyungan languages—primarily because these languages exhibit a striking homogeneity with respect to their grammaticalized avertive markers. Non-Pama-Nyungan are frequently endowed with what I will refer to as *irrealis-avertive inflections*. These typologically unique inflections are especially worthy of consideration due to their striking polyfunctionality (first identified for Murrinh-Patha in Nordlinger and Caudal 2012), spanning various types of modal and postmodal meanings (see van der Auwera and Plungian 1998).

6.3.1 On the polyfunctionality of irrealis-avertive inflections in nPN languages

(21) ngay-dha ngatha-ka me-mawatha-dha-wa (Murrinh-Patha)

1sg-IMPF if-FOC 1sgS.hands(8).PST.IRR-rectify-IMPF-EMPH

‘If it had have been me, I would have rectified it.’ (Street and Street 1989)

(22) be-lele-dha-wa (Murrinh-Patha)

3sgS.13.PST.IRR-bite-IMPF-EMPH

(that carpet snake was coming towards him) ‘It was going to bite him (but didn’t)’. (Nordlinger and Caudal 2012: 106)

(23) marda the-na-mut-tha palngun. (Murrinh-Patha)

neg 2sgS.poke(19).PST.IRR-3sg.m.ben-give-IMPF female

a. ‘You didn’t give him that girl.’

b. ‘You shouldn’t have given him that girl.’ (Nordlinger and Caudal 2012: 106)

Through collaborative work and field work¹⁸ on the modal systems of other non-Pama-Nyungan, I later discovered that Iwaidjan (Iwaidja (24)–(26)), Gunwinyguan (Anindilyakwa (27)–(28)) and Mirndi languages (Jaminjung, (29)–

¹⁸ I am indebted to joint work conducted with Rob Mailhammer on Iwaidja and with James Bednall on Anindilyakwa (including field work), and with Eva Schultze-Berndt on Jaminjung (see in particular Caudal and Schultze-Berndt 2016).

(30)) also have similar patterns; note in particular, that the remarkable ambiguity found in (23), seems to be common among non-Pama-Nyungan languages, as shown by e.g., (26) and (28):

(24) ayana-wu-ni (Iwaidja)

1sg>3pl.PCF-hit-PCF

‘I was going to hit them/I nearly hit them’ (but I didn’t). (Caudal and Mailhammer 2021)

(25) yuwa-ran mungu. Angana-mi-na (Iwaidja)

2sg.ANT.PROX-come-ANT not.know 2sg.PCF-say-PCF

ngartung, ngana-lakbi-nayuw-ara. Ba

OBL.1sg 1sg.PCF-know-PCF 2sg.PR-go-PR CONJ

karlu ngana-mi-na nuwung.

NEG 1sg.PCF-say-PCF OBL.2sg

‘You just came without letting me know. You should have let me know, because if I had known you were coming, I would have said ‘no’ to you.’ (Iwaidja dictionary)

(26) karlu ayana-wu-ni (Iwaidja)

NEG 1sg>3pl.PCF-hit-PCF

1. ‘I didn’t hit them.’

2. ‘I should not have hit them’. (Caudal et al 2019)

(27) n-akəna kə-rrak-aje=yedha chair=manja (Anindilyakwa)

3M-that IRR.3M-forehead-stand.PST=PURP NEUT.chair=LOC

ekena dh-akəna dhədharrəngka yingmən-angma-Ø=dhə

then 3F-that 3F.woman REAL.3F>VEG(?)-steal-USP=TRM

akən chair=a

NEUT.that NEUT.chair=PF

‘He was going to sit on the chair, but the woman took it away’ (Bednall 2020: 371)

(28) nara n-akəna kenu-kwa-Ø a-rmdak-akənaangwarnda (Anindilyakwa)

NEG 3m-that PCF.3m/2-give-PCF neut-many-that neut.money

1. He didn’t give you all that money

2. He shouldn’t have given you all that money. (Bednall 2020: 345)

(29) yatha nga-b-irriga-na mangarra dempa damarlung (Jaminjung)

alright 1sg:3sg- POT:COOK-IMPF plant.food damper nothing

‘I was going to/wanted to bake bread all right, damper, (but) nothing (i.e. I didn’t)’ (Schultze-Berndt 2000: 93)

(30) yagbali birdij gana-w-arra-nyi, (Jaminjung)

place find 3sg:3sg-FUT-PUT-IMPF

Buru ga-jga-ny Gurlugurlu waga ga-rdba-ny

return 3sg-GO.PST <place.name> sit 3sg-FALL-PST

‘he wanted to find a camp, he went back to Gurlugurlu and sat down (i.e. stayed there)’ (Schultze-Berndt 2000: 93)

6.3.2 Language sample, method and overview of avertive structures

For want of space to address the huge diversity of forms existing across Australian languages,¹⁹ the survey offered here will be limited to a relatively small sample of seventeen languages, taken from seven non-Pama-Nyungan language families, and six Pama-Nyungan language families as in Table 6.1.

<COMP: INSERT Table 6.1 NEAR HERE>

Table 6.2 summarizes the results of the grammar mining study conducted on the sample, combined with field work results on two languages. It lists several avertivity-related morphosyntactic and semantic patterns found in the sample.

<COMP: INSERT Table 6.2 NEAR HERE>

Columns 3–6 serve to identify what I will dub ‘irrealis-avertive cluster paradigms’, i.e. forms exhibiting (at least part of) the polyfunctionality identified in Section 6.3.1: column 3 lists the forms combining an avertive meaning (often avertive implicatures) with at least two other modal meanings; column 4 specifies whether the language has

¹⁹ While a larger areal typological study has been conducted on a larger sample of 67 languages, its results are far too complex to discuss in such limited space.

morphologized the distinction between irrealis present vs past; column 5 indicates whether irrealis-avertive forms have present vs. past counterparts; column 6 indicates whether or not they have volitional/proximative meanings. All the remaining columns (6–11) are associated with other types of avertive patterns—or avertive strategies, in the case of column 11, as we will see below.

Last but not least, I left out from this study lexical avertives (‘fail’) such as (31); these are frequent (e.g. Mawng has several specialized lexical avertives),²⁰ and as such also reflect on a cognitively pervasive category, but I am focusing on grammatical devices alone here.

(31) ηai caŋkaaṭi ηuŋca-na ηuji-na (Kalkatungu)

 I here fail-PST fall-PST

 ‘I nearly fell’ (or ‘I escaped from falling’) (Blake 1979a: 61)

6.4 Discussion and empirical generalizations

Let us now discuss the facts summarized in Table 6.2 and offer some tentative empirical generalizations concerning the form and meaning of avertive patterns in Australian languages. Several recurrent morpho-syntactic types of lexico-grammatical structures were found in the sample, and are of particular relevance to the present study, cf. (32):

(32) Tentative list of types of avertive structures

²⁰ In some Australian languages though, lexical/constructional are not known to exist, or at least were not elicited in past field work studies, cf. e.g. Wubuy (Heath 1984: 345).

1. Synthetic modal inflections, especially irrealis/potential/future, but also narrower modal inflections, such as ‘PURPositive’ (in Arrernte) or ‘INTENTive’ (in Yankunytjatjara) endowed with more or less clear avertive implicatures (some border on the conventional, already) even without any additional material—see columns 3–6
2. Periphrastic irrealis/avertives, combining an inflectional element (modal or not), and a dedicated modal-avertive element (as pre- or postverbal particles, clitics, affixes/ infixes, or a combination of several such elements) (columns 7 and 8). These generally semanticized avertive patterns are typically found in non-Pama-Nyungan languages in our sample, but also in neighbouring Pama-Nyungan language families (Tangkic, Ngumpin-Yapa, Arandic, Karnic, and Western Desert). Among indicative inflections, both imperfective, and aspectually underspecified (perfective/imperfective) markings seem to be found. (Admittedly, one can discuss whether all these data points effectively constitute instances of periphrastic avertive morphology, but for the sake of simplicity, I will assume that they do.)
3. REDuplication and pluractional imperfective-based patterns (column 9), without additional morphological markers, but frequently in combination with special ‘durative’ intonations—this a strongly aspect-driven type of avertive pattern; it can be conventionalized as a dedicated avertive, or a ‘pragmatic strategy’ to convey avertivity.
4. Any of the above avertive structures can combine with negative markers in order to form what I will claim to be conventionalized, reduced biclausal avertive constructions—see column 10.
5. ‘Partitive culminations’ (a term I’m coining after [Martin and Demirdache \(2020\)](#)’s *partitive accomplishments*, to generalize beyond so-called non-culminating accomplishments) utterances (see column 11), i.e. telic indicative utterances marked with a tense receiving a ‘weak’ perfective reading, without clear culmination or stable results—‘X V-ed but did not finish V-ing/failed to V’.

I will successively discuss below each of these avertive patterns ([Sections 6.4.1–6.4.5](#)), before briefly addressing the issue of aspectual, temporal and modal parameters underlying avertivity the sample ([Section 6.4.6](#)).

6.4.1 Avertive pattern no. 1: Synthetic inflectional past modal avertives and the (typically non-Pama-Nyungan) irrealis-avertive cluster

Avertive patterns involving a (synthetic) past modal inflection are one of the two predominant structures in the sample, with sixteen languages out of seventeen offering at least one such pattern (column 1 in [Table 6.2](#)). The present study also confirmed that the type of polyfunctionality identified in [Section 6.3.1](#) is found in all non-Pama-Nyungan language families of our sample, with some limited variation: Bininj Gun-wok and Mawng stand out with respect to the temporal anchoring of the irrealis; it is completely neutralized in Bininj Gun-wok system (the irrealis inflection can have both present and past anchoring) and partially neutralized in Mawng (the IRR2 inflection can have present anchoring under its priority²¹/deontic readings). Examples of the irrealis-avertive cluster in Iwaidjan, Gunwinyguan (cf. Kunbarlang (33)–(34) and Bininj-Gunwok (35)–(38)),²² Bunuban (Goonyiandi (39)–(41)), Maningrida languages (Gurr-goni (42)–(45)) and Nyulnyulan languages (Nyikina (46)–(48)) are given below:²³

²¹ In the sense of [Portner \(2018\)](#). Imperatives are semantically performative priority modals, whereas deontic are only contextually, indirectly performative modals. Many so-called ‘imperatives’ in descriptions of Australian languages rather seem to be deontic modals—or even semantically broader modals, with deontic uses, and contextually performative deontic (imperative/hortative-like) uses. In our sample, see e.g. the so-called ‘imperative’ in Bilinarra ([Meakins and Nordlinger 2014](#)), which I here claim to be an irrealis/modal inflection.

²² I must thank Murray Garde for pointing out to me that the kind of ambiguity exhibited by (23) also existed in the Bininj Gun-wok modal system.

²³ I will not attempt to provide a more thorough inventory of non-Pama-Nyungan language families exhibiting the same polyfunctionality for irrealis-avertive inflections, but similar observations can also be made about several others.

(33) ngunda ngay-buddu-wuni. (Kunbarlang)²⁴

not 1sg.IRR.PST-3pl.obj-give.IRR.PST

‘I didn’t give it to them.’ (Kapitonov 2019: 8)

(34) nguddu-yung mandjang ki-nguddu-bu. (Kunbarlang)

2pl.IRR.NP-lie.IRR.NPST perhaps 3sg.IRR.NPST-2pl.obj-hit.IRR.NP

‘If you sleep [in the house] you might get hurt.’ (Kapitonov 2019: 188)

(35) yi-man.ga-yi. (Bininj Gun-wok)

2-fall-IRR

‘You nearly fell.’ (Evans 2003: 373)

(36) a-rrowkme-ninj / a-bu-yi. (Bininj Gun-wok)

1/3-shoot-IRR 1/3-hit-IRR

‘I nearly shot it/nearly hit it.’ (Evans 2003: 373)

²⁴ As opposed to Bininj Gun-wok, most of the attested averitive utterances in Kunbarlang appear to require *yimarne(k)*. I will leave Kunbarlang in that list for the sake of prudence, though, as it could be that averitive readings of the irrealis past inflection are simply undocumented.

(37) larrk, marrek Mardayin birri-bimbuyi, ya na-djamun (Bininj Gun-wok)
nothing NEG. [ceremony] 3AugP-paint-IRR yeah MA-sacred
'No, they didn't paint Mardayin ceremony designs, they are sacred.' (Evans 2003: 282)

(38) bi-ma-yi Na-burlanj gun-mak. (Bininj Gun-wok)
3/3hP-marry-IRR MA-[skin] IV-good
'She should have married straight, to a Naburlanj man.' (Evans 2003: 375)

(39) yaanya thangarndi jaggilimirni nyinlimi (Goonyiandi)
other word I:might:have:said I:forgot:it
'I was going to tell another story, but I forget it.' (McGregor 1990: 534)

(40) manyi yan.ginngindi wardgilarninganggi marlami(Goonyiandi)
food you:asked:me I:might:have:brought:it:for:you not
'You asked me for bread. I should have brought you some [but I didn't]'. (McGregor 1990: 535)

(41) wardngirni milaalarni (Goonyiandi)

I:might:have:gone I:might:have:seen:him

‘(Had you told me) I would have gone and seen him.’ (McGregor 1990: 534)

(42) weleng galu awurr-beki-ya+rni. njiwurr-ni-Ønjiwurr-rruw djji-ni.

then NEG 3AugS-arrive, come out-IRRL IAugs-sit-Pre IAugs-cry-Pre

‘Then they didn’t come. We sat (and) cried.’ (Gurr-goni) (Green 1995: 341)

(43) wurru at-gardi nji-na-ga-tji-rni ngapala. (Gurr-goni)

but 3I-flesh 2MinA.3MinO-twds-take-IRR1 IMin+DAT

‘But you might have brought some meat for me.’ (Green 1995: 196)

(44) gi-yini-gi+rni ngu-bogi-ya+rni Nangak, worro. (Gurr-goni)

[3IVS-do thus-IRR1] 1MinS-go-IRRL place.name what.a.pity

‘I was going to go to Nangak today, what a pity.’ (Green 1995: 196)

(45) maka dji-na-djeka-nga+rni, nguwurr-bogi-ya+rni. (Gurr-goni)

FaMo 3IIS-twds-go back-IRRL 1+2Augs-go-IRRL

‘Your grandma could have come back, (so) we could all have gone.’ (= if your grandma had come back, we would all have gone) (Green 1995: 196)

(46) ɲɲa-la-MA-na-dyi²⁵ miliya maɭu ɲa-la-MA-na (Nyikina)

lsg-IRR-go-PST-EXP now NEG lsg-IRR-go-PST

‘I was going to go this morning but I didn’t go’ (Stokes 1982: 281)

(47) malu ɲa-l(a)-ANDI-ny-dyina ginya-yi (Nyikina)

NEG lsg-IRR-pick.up-PST₂-3sgDATPRO DEM-DAT

‘I didn’t get (it) for that one!’ (Stokes 1982: 69)

(48) ya-la-(rr)-DI-na-da mabu (Nyikina)

lsg-IRR-(nmin)-sit-PST-HABIT good

‘we should have been good (but we weren’t)’ (Stokes 1982: 281)

²⁵ Stokes (1982: 14) notes *ɲ* what he describes as a ‘nasal dorsal’, but it’s unclear what kind of velar nasal it is exactly—possibly

just /ŋ/.

6.4.2. Avertive pattern no. 2: Periphrastic irrealis/avertives

Let us turn now to avertives based on a combination of a dedicated avertive particle or clitic, plus some inflectional element—whether indicative or irrealis (i.e., modal). Patterns of that type are also widely represented in our study, with sixteen languages offering them, cf. columns 7 and 8 in [Table 6.2](#). Periphrastic avertive inflection exhibiting an indicative past marked (whether imperfective, or aspectually underspecified) are slightly less common in our sample, than irrealis-marked patterns, cf. e.g. (49)–(50).

(49) mundjarra ngu-rra-dji+rni wurru warrpura (Gurr-goni)
AVERT 1MinA.3MinO-shoot-IRRL but underarm.sweat
gu-numi-rri ngapala.
3MinA.31VO-smell-Pre IMin+DAT
'I tried to/was going to shoot it, but it smelt my sweat (and ran off).' ([Green 1995](#): 314)

(50) miliyarri dumarra ŋa- l(a)-ANDI-na (Nyikina)
almost take off lsg-IRR-pick up-PST
'I nearly took off'. ([Stokes 1982](#): 281)

As a matter of fact, synthetic irrealis-avertive inflections as listed under Section 6.4.1 frequently serve to form periphrastic avertive patterns, by combining with special particles or clitics, usually modal-avertive or proximative-avertive ('nearly/almost'). Whether these are specifically proximative adverbials/particles ('nearly, almost'), or specifically modal/avertive markers, is an obviously complex question. I will simply treat them as instances of

periphrastic avertives, since it is often quite difficult to make an informed decision based on a handful of examples in a grammar.

While these periphrastic patterns are most salient in languages not possessing (or not fully possessing) the irrealis-avertive cluster—i.e. Pilbara, Arandic, Western Desert, and Karnic languages of our sample—they are also attested in languages possessing it, e.g. in non-Pama-Nyungan languages, cf. e.g. Nyikina (50), Gurr-goni (51), and Iwaidja (52). This results in languages possessing multiple inflectional forms capable of conveying avertive interpretations, with the periphrastic form semantically encoding avertivity, vs. the synthetic form pragmatically implicating it, in most cases.

(51) mundjarra ngu-rra-dji+rni wurru warrpura (Gurr-goni)

AVERT 1MinA.3MinO-shoot-IRRL but underarm.sweat

gu-numi-rri ngapala.

3MinA.31VO-smell-Pre IMin+DAT

‘I tried to/was going to shoot it, but it smelt my sweat (and ran off).’ (Green 1995: 314)

(52) Maju ana-man-yi. (Iwaidja)

VOL 1sg>3sg.PCF-take-PCF

‘I was going to take it but didn’t.’ (Iwaidja dictionary)

A first subtype of pattern no. 2 involves a dedicated averitive negative particle with a ‘tried (in vain)’ negative meaning in the past, cf. e.g. *ngarla* in Ngaliwurru (a dialect of Jaminjung) (53),²⁶ or, more commonly, a semantically negative averitive particle such as *pilyparr* (‘in vain’) in Ngarla (54). A second subtype of indicate past averitive involves a proximative, *de facto* semantically negative proximative particle with a ‘nearly/almost’ meaning, cf. e.g. *walyi* in Ngarla (55).²⁷ And finally, a third type is illustrated in the sample (again) by *putu* (‘can’t’) in Yankunytjatjara (56), a clearly modal particle which can combine with the (aspectually underspecified) past tense to convey averitive meanings (alongside with other modal or postmodal meanings, including a negative capacity meaning, according to James Grey, (p.c)—note that Ngarla possesses a ‘for nothing, for no reason, unwillingly’ *purtu-karri* particle, which is obviously derived from a related *purtu* particle.

(53) yugung gan-jib-unga-nyi, (...), ngarla wilng (Ngaliwurru)

run 3sg:1sg-POT-LEAVE-IMPF TRY stay.back

nga-ngu

1sg:3sg-GET/HANDLE.PST

‘he was going to run away from me, (...) but I tried to hold him back’ (Schultze-Berndt 2000: 479)

²⁶ Note that like (30), (53) offers an instance of a non-averitive, proximative reading of a verb (*gan-jib-unga-nyi*) in the POT-IMPF (IRR.PST) inflection; it also illustrates that averitive meanings are contextually determined for such polysemous inflectional forms).

²⁷ Nyangumarta, a related Pilbara language, possesses two similar (indicative) averitive particles: *partal* ‘in vain’ and *katu(rr)/kartungurru* ‘nearly’ (cf. Sharp 2004: 133, 181).

(54) pilyparr ngaja yarni+ma-rnu pirrjarta. (Ngarla)
 unsuccessfully 1sg.ERG repair[+CAUS]-PST vehicle
 ‘Unsuccessfully I repaired (the) vehicle.’ (I.e. ‘I failed to repair the vehicle.’) (Westerlund 2015: 75)

(55) nyinta walyi wakurr ja-rnu ngunyi karlajangu. (Ngarla)
 2sg.ERG almost secure CAUS-PST DEM (distant) cattle
 ‘You almost had that cattle (i.e. cow/bull) secured (i.e. yarded up).’ (Westerlund 2015: 175)

(56) ngayulu putu nya-ngu (Yankunytjatjara)
 1sg(ERG) IN.VAIN see-PAST
 ‘I couldn’t see/find it’ [= I tried to, but in vain] (Goddard 1983: 247)

Most of the particles involved in periphrastic avertives seem inherently, semantically negative (including proximatives). This is clearly the case of the Western Desert *putu* (‘can’t/couldn’t/in vain’) particle, which combines with a derived INCHOative verb formed on a modal noun (through the nominalizer *-kitja-* INTENT) (57), and of the Warlpiri *kula-nganta* (NEG+MOD) particle (58), which requires a *Aux.FUT V-IRR* complex irrealis inflection on the verb (and is fused with the *Aux* element). The latter avertive has clear negative evidential, so-called ‘mistaken thought’ undertones (‘things were not what they seemed’)—I will come back to this later in this chapter. But again, what matters most here is that the semantic status of the avertive readings one can generally assign to such periphrastic forms contrast with the pragmatic nature of avertive

interpretations associated with (most, if not all) synthetic past modal inflections in our sample, as shown in Section 6.4.1.

- (57) ngayulu puṯu wangka-kitja-ri-ringa-ngi (Yankunytjatjara)
- 1sg(NOM) IN.VAIN talk-INTENT-INCHO-PAST.IMPF
- ‘I wanted to talk with them in vain’ (e.g. they wouldn’t listen) (Goddard 1983: 131)

- (58) Kula.nganta-kapi-rna wawirri panti-ka-rla, (kala lawa). (Warlpiri)
- NEG.MOD-FUT-I kangaroo spear-IRR (but no)
- ‘I thought I was going to spear the kangaroo, but I didn’t.’ (Nash 1980: 239)

As I have noted above, the sort of polyfunctionality I dubbed in Section 6.4.1 ‘the irrealis-avertive’ cluster, also seems to associate with periphrastic irrealis-avertives. It notably permeates part of the Pama-Nyungan zone, especially Ngumin-Yapa, Tangkic and (to a lesser extent) Pilbara languages, as their periphrastic IRR.PST forms exhibit most traits of the non-Pama-Nyungan irrealis-avertive cluster (columns 3–6)—but it does not seem to extend to Arandic, Western Desert, and Karnic languages (these lack either negative past events encoded by NEG+PST.IRR, and/or a volitional/proximate PST.IRR).

Kayardild (Tangkic) is such a case of Pama-Nyungan irrealis-avertive cluster, with two distinct avertive patterns. The first of these four patterns is the irrealis-proximate periphrasis *V-nangarra* ‘almost V/would have Ved’.²⁸ It is

²⁸ Glossed as ‘ALMOST’ in Evans (1985, 1995).

compatible with both agentive and non-agentive verbs; it selects the modal ABLative case, as in (59)–(60)—hence its periphrastic nature.

- (59) bulkurdudu ngijin-jina baa-nangarra kurthurr-ina (Kayardild)
 crocodileNOM 1sgPOSS-MABL bite-AVERT shin-MABL
 'A crocodile almost bit me on the leg.' (Evans 1995: 261)

- (60) [Of a man crushed by a falling tree:]
 niya budii-nangarr, [warirra-ntha barji-n-marri-nja (Kayardild)
 3sgNOM run-AVERT nothing-COBL fall-N-PRIV-COBL
 niwan-jinaa-nth]
 COBL3sg-MABL-COBL
 'He just about got away, then nothing would have happened, it wouldn't have fallen on him.' (Evans 1995: 261)

The more polyfunctional counterfactual particle *nginja*²⁹ combines with the indicative 'non-future' (here, contextually past) tense (V-ACT) to form a wider periphrastic irrealis-avertive cluster with a range of meanings similar to those found with e.g. the Iwaidja past irrealis-avertive, namely (negative) past/present deontic ('X shouldn't have V-ed/shouldn't V'), cf. (61)–(63). A *nginja* + V-POT 'X will V for nothing' meaning also seems to be attested (see Evans (1995: 383)). Furthermore, as it is able to combine with nominalized verbs (64), it is reasonable to assume that

²⁹ Glossed as 'FRUSTtrative' in Evans (1985, 1995).

(64) nginja rikarrkati-n-da kularrin-d (Kayardild)

CTRFAC2 cry-N-NOM brother-NOM

‘Your brother shouldn’t be crying.’ (Evans 1995: 340)

Turning now to non-Pama-Nyungan languages, Bininj Gun-wok offers one of the most extended periphrastic avertive system in our sample. Its most prominent periphrastic avertive pattern involves the counterfactual *yimarnek* (originally a simulative (‘like’) marker), combined with (past) irrealis marking, (65)–(66).

(65) yimarnek kam-ra-yinj la Ngarridj (Bininj Gun-wok)

CTRFAC 3.PROX.PST-go-IRR CONJ [subsection]

bi-rrahme-ng.

3/3hP-block-PFV

‘She was going to come but the Ngarridj wouldn’t let her’ (Evans 2003: 611)

(66) yimarnek nga-rrulubu-yi, la Ø-bid-deyhmeng, minj Ø-dowkme-ninj. (Bininj Gun-wok)

CTRFAC 1/3-shoot-IRR but 3-hand-clickpp not 3P-go.off-IRR

‘I tried to shoot but the trigger just clicked without it (the gun) discharging.’ (Evans 2003: 611)

The Bininj Gun-wok irrealis inflection seems to be one of the rare instances in our sample, of a temporally ambiguous irrealis—i.e. it can have both present and past temporal modal meanings. However, it is uniformly past in such periphrastic irrealis-avertive structures. This fact suggests a strong correlation between averitivity and pastness.

On top of the *yirmarnek* periphrasis, Bininj Gun-wok possesses a second irrealis-avertive periphrasis involving counterfactual particle *maraka* plus a POT-marked verb. Although the POT inflection normally has present temporal anchoring, such structures uniformly anchor to the past; this also suggests a strong correlation between irrealis-avertive meanings and pastness. *Maraka* + V-POT forms a broad irrealis-avertive cluster, with readings ‘should have, could have (but didn’t)’, ‘would have, was going to, meant/wanted to (but didn’t)’, cf. (67)–(70). In addition to POT verbs, *maraka* can combine with non-future (ACT)-inflected verbs, and then has ‘pretend’ (related to evidential ‘not what it seems’ uses) (see [Evans \(1995\)](#): 378). Like *yirmarnek*, the original meaning of *makara* is also similitive (‘like’).

(67) maraka yuuma-thu barruntha-y (Bininj Gun-wok)
CTRAC1 drown-POT yesterday-MLOC
‘He could have drowned yesterday (but didn’t).’ ([Evans 1995](#): 379)

(68) kilda maraka diya-nangku mala-wu (Bininj Gun-wok)
2pl.all CTRAC1 drink-NEG.FUT beer-MPROP
‘(You schoolkids) shouldn’t have drunk that beer.’ ([Evans 1995](#): 383)

- (69) yakuri-wu maraka kurdala-thu, maraka maku-nku³⁰ (Bininj Gun-wok)
 fish-MPROP CTRFAC1 spear-POT CTRFAC1 use.bark.torch-NEG.POT
 kurdala-thu yakuri-wu.
 spear-POT fish-MPROP
 ‘he had meant to spear fish, to spear fish using a bark torch’ (Evans 1995: 722)

- (70) maraka birdiru-thu! (Bininj Gun-wok)
 CTRFAC1 miss-POT
 ‘(They said) I was going to miss, but I didn’t!’ (Evans 1995: 654)

Iwaidja offers the second most developed periphrastic avertive in our sample, with periphrases *maju*+*V-PST* and *wurrkany* + *V-PST/FUT*,³¹ (cf. (71)–(74)). One should also mention the Kunbarlang *yimarnek* + *V-IRR.PST* irrealis-avertive structure, (75), cf. (Kapitonov and Gentens 2018); it is clearly related to the Bininj Gun-wok *yimarnek* + *V-IRR* irrealis avertive.

- (71) maju ngana-ngiru-nyi. (Iwaidja)

³⁰ Because of this NEG.POT form; I suspect the rendering of this example should rather be: ‘he had meant to spear fish, to spear fish without using a bark torch’—indeed the agent got lost in the fog as a result of not seeing anything.

³¹ *Maju* is derived from root *maju* ‘want’, so it is a clear volitional modal, while *wurrkany* suspiciously looks like an intransitive 3p. past verbal form (*w-urrka-ny*); it could possibly be related to the *-burrkan-* (tr.) ‘dream’ root, which would be in line with its negative evidential, hence avertive meanings.

VOL 1sg.PCF-board-PCF

‘I was going to get in the car (but didn’t).’ (Iwaidja dictionary)

(72) maju birdir**lkbu**-ny. Nganduka a-bi-ny? (Iwaidja)

VOL 3sg.ANT-struggle.fre-ANT INT 3sg.ANT-do-ANT?

‘He tried to struggle free but in vain.’ (lit. ‘but for what?’) (Iwaidja dictionary)

(73) wurrkany yanara karlu artirra-n. (Iwaidja)

FRUST 3sg.DIST.FUT-go-FUT NEG 3sg.ANT-come.back.ANT

‘He was going to go/tried to go, but (no,) he came back.’ (Iwaidja dictionary)

(74) wurrkany awukung ba walij (Iwaidja)

FRUST 1sg>3sg.ANT-give-ANT DET food

rardudban

3msg>3sg.ANT-leave.behind-ANT

‘I tried to give him food but he left it behind.’ (Caudal and Mailhammer 2021)

(75) na-buk yimarnek ki-buddu-karlkkangki (Kunbarlang)

cl1-person CTRFAC 3sg.NEG-3pl.O-stalk.IRR.PST

la kadda-rnay la kadda-bum.

CONJ 3pl.NF-see.PST CONJ 3pl.NF-hit.PST

‘He was going to sneak up on them, but they saw him and beat him.’ (Kapitonov 2019: 291)

In Kayardild, Bininj Gun-wok, Iwaidja, and Kunbarlang, these patterns involve a modal particle with a future/present irrealis or indicative past inflected verb, offering at least two modal/evidential readings on top of an avertive reading.³² The latter property is key to treating them as irrealis-avertive periphrases, coexisting with non-periphrastic irrealis-avertive forms (the IRR.PST paradigm in Iwaidja, the V-IRR form in Bininj Gun-wok, and the POT inflection in Kayardild). Note however that in Kunbarlang, the V-IRR.PST synthetic irrealis seems not to have avertive readings (any more?). In Bininj Gun-wok, Iwaidja, and Kayardild (but not in Kunbarlang),³³ periphrastic irrealis-avertive inflections logically are the *marked* members of these complex irrealis systems.³⁴ I believe this partly explains an important contrast between synthetic, vs (negative) particle-based irrealis-avertives: the former seem to (often) encode avertivity

³² *Wurrkany* + V-FUT/IRR/PST can have evidential, proximative, volitional and avertive meanings in Iwaidja; in Kayardild, *nginja* + V-ACT can have past irrealis deontic readings (‘should have’), as well as avertive readings (‘tried and failed’). In addition to this, *jginja* + V-FUT can have negative predictive (‘won’t’) readings.

³³ *Yimarnek* + V-IRR.PST Kunbarlang utterances seem to require a reduced negative clause construction to receive their full avertive reading—this suggests the periphrastic inflection has grammaticalized further, i.e. is less a markedly avertive form, and might be on the verge of replacing V-IRR.PST as the general past irrealis—proof of this can be found in the fact that only the periphrastic form seems to have proximative/volitional meaning; its modal range of meaning is in fact already larger than that of the synthetic V-IRR.PST form.

³⁴ Unsurprisingly, the Kayardild *nangarra* monofunctional avertive inflection also seems to semantically encode avertivity; judging from the examples given by N. Evans, it is unnecessary to strengthen the implicature *via* a subsequent clause.

as a mere implicature (type 1 of avertivity), while with the latter, avertivity seems to be (often) semantically conveyed (type 2). Jaminjung examples (29) vs (30) are a perfect illustration of the defeasible, conversational implicature status of the avertive reading associated with at least some synthetic past irrealis-avertives; context can defeat the ‘failure’ implicature (as is clearly the case in the latter example) in some languages endowed with such forms. This being said, depending on languages, it is not always easy to get speakers to accept such cancellations of failure implicatures; in Iwaidja, dedicated fieldwork suggested that many speakers harbour at least a certain hesitation to accept a non-failed reading of an IRR.PST-marked avertive.³⁵ While further investigations are obviously necessary, there already seems to be some variation in our sample w.r.t. synthetic irrealis inflections (with some, the avertive interpretation seems to be more pragmatically defeasible than with others).

But besides being a marked form, all the above periphrastic irrealis-avertive inflections incorporate a particle whose meaning is counterfactual/similative, and generally negative (e.g. ‘not what is seems’). This, I will argue, largely explains why these forms convey negative past events. In contrast, synthetic irrealis avertives seem to have (at most) negative implicatures; this also partly explains why they have developed negative past event meanings.³⁶ Possessing an

³⁵ Interestingly, Iwaidja also possesses periphrastic modals, combining a modal particle with a variety of tense marking. With some of them (esp. *wurrkany*, cf. (73)–(74)), the avertive meaning is very clearly semantic and non-defeasible—much more so than the avertive interpretation of the IRR.PST inflection is.

³⁶ Although due to the lack of space I cannot really elaborate on this, it must be said that the sample contains datapoints strongly suggesting that the NEG+V-IRR.PST pattern (column 5) often conveying negative past events, derives from the extension of an entailment attached to the negation of a proximative-volitional modal base (cf. English (originally volitional) past irrealis *would*, where ‘X wouldn’t V’ entails ‘X refused to V/didn’t V’). In Gooniyandi, negative past event entailment readings are attested with a negative (volitional) irrealis past (NEG X V-IRR.PST = ‘X refused to/did not attempt to V’), cf. [McGregor \(1990: 535\)](#). It seems to me very likely that the negative past event readings of NEG+V-IRR.PST in other languages derives from the generalization of originally negative volitional entailments, to non-agentive verbs (again, see English *would*, as in ‘the knife wouldn’t cut’), so that from ‘X refused to V’, these utterances came to mean just ‘X didn’t V’.

overt negative content is, we will see, a necessary ingredient of *bona fide* semantic avertives. This explains why Kayardild stands out (again!) for possessing the only clearly semantic avertive based on a synthetic inflection, namely NEG.POT under its negative capacity reading. See (76), which effectively means that a vain attempt at finding (and killing) someone took place.

(76) [context: ‘them mob’ try to find someone so as to spear and stab him]

kaba-nangku, kuru-lu-nangku niwan-ju (Kayardild)

find-neg.pot dead-FAC-NEG.POT 3sg-MPROP

‘But (they) couldn’t hit home, couldn’t kill him.’ (Evans 1995: 581)

As we have already seen, a number of combinations of (apparently)³⁷ proximative adverbials, particles, clitics, and prefixes or suffixes glossed ‘almost, nearly’, also appear in the sample, cf. e.g. *wanji* in Iwaidja, *klosap* in Murrinh-Patha, *kuyin-/ba(r)lanh-V-PST/IRR* in Bininj Gun-wok, *akwədhangwa* (‘near(ly)’) in Anindilyakwa, *bulu* and *miliyarri* in Nyikina, *wambawoo* in Gooniyandi (77), the two cognate suffixes *-alpa/-elpe* in Arapana vs Arrernte, etc. (cf. column 8 in Table 6.2). It should also be mentioned that Arapana has an additional avertive particle, *panta*, glossed by L. Hercus as ‘in vain’, combining with past tense marking, and which seems to have a distinct proximative meaning close to ‘hardly’ (Hercus 1994: 238)—it very much looks like a case of proximative-turned-avertive particle. Most of these proximative markers seem to associate with either perfective (or perfective uses of) indicative past tenses.

Had all of these forms been intrinsically, semantically negative from the onset (i.e. had they meant something like ‘[X] didn’t want to V’), their combination with an additional negation might have proven troublesome for them to develop negative past event readings.

³⁷ Of course, further investigations would be required to actually tell apart *bona fide* proximative markers from modals glossed as proximatives in certain grammars.

However, Bininj Gun-wok affixes *kuyin-/ballanh-* can combine with an irrealis tense, and an imperfective tense in an iterative context (i.e., with multiple averted events). Similarly, the Anindhilyakwa proximal adverbial *akwədhangwa* can combine with the irrealis non-past to signal a present perfect-like proximal (78)—a reading obtaining in Bininj Gun-wok too, cf. (79); (78) and (79) are probably the closest equivalent to a present averted we can come by. All in all, given their apparently arbitrary distribution with various inflections, these datapoints seem to pertain to some kind of conventionalized periphrastic averted construction.

(77) wambawoo gilangginaddirni (Goonyiandi)

nearly it:might:have:knocked:me

‘(the car) nearly knocked me.’ (McGregor 1990: 533)

(78) akwədhangwa ka-lharrəmərđhə-na=ma (Anindhilyakwa)

near IRR.NEUT-darkness-NPST=MUT

‘It’s nearly dark’ [source translation] (Leeding 1989: 454)

(79) A-bal-guyin-yakwo-yi. (Bininj Gun-wok)

1-away-nearly-finish-IRR

‘I’ve nearly finished.’ (Evans 2003: 525)

6.4.3 Avertive pattern no. 3: Pluractional imperfective and REDuplication based patterns (with or without additional markers)

Let us turn next to another class of avertive structures possibly exhibiting indicative tense marking, namely utterances denoting pluractional event structures. These often involve imperfective morphology or aspectually underspecified morphology alongside, either within an iterative context, or in combination with clitics, particles or adverbials enforcing an iterative interpretation—especially intonations marking event durativity, and/or reduplication (RED) morphology.³⁸

Imperfective tenses in many Australian languages of our sample have clear pluractional readings, and these frequently crop up in contexts where the speaker insists on the fact that some agent made a protracted but vain attempt, cf. (80); they are instances of proximative/volitional-avertives (the agent’s desire is highlighted). And in addition to simple iterated avertives, habitual avertives are also possible in Yankunytjatjara, cf. (81).

(80) kaa-na Kanytji-nya puṯu tjapi-ningi (Yankunytjatjara)

CONTR-1sg(ERG) Kanytji-ACC IN.VAIN ask-PST.IMPF

‘And I kept asking Kanytji to no avail.’ (Goddard 1983: 62)

(81) papa-ngku puṯu riṯji-milal-payi, puṯu wawani-ma (Yankunytjatjara)

dog-ERG IN.VAIN reach-LOAN-CHAR IN.VAIN jump.up.on hind legs-IMP.IMPF

³⁸ Note that even languages where so-called perfective tenses are identified in grammars, seem to rather be aspectually underspecified past tenses, akin to the English simple past. Thus, the so-called ‘past perfective’ in Bininj Gun-wok, is obviously capable of past imperfective readings too, cf. e.g. examples 5–61 p. 145, and 5–69 pp. 146–147 in [Evans \(2003\)](#).

‘But dingoes couldn’t reach them, they’d dump up on their hind legs to no avail.’

Verb reduplication is another recurrent imperfective-like, proximative/volitional-avertive pattern found across both non-Pama-Nyungan (Iwaidja, Bininj Gun-wok, Nyikina) and Pama-Nyungan languages (Kayardild, Bilinarra, Ngarla,³⁹ Arrernte), cf. (82)–(85)—and it is likely to be more widespread than shown by this grammar mining study, even in our sample. Verb reduplication can be regarded as an imperfectivizing device, especially when the tenses involved are aspectually underspecified. The result is a near-imperfective structure, with the iteration often highlighting the agentive nature of the verb used (such avertive reduplication were limited to agentive telic verbs in the data we examined), and therefore the ‘volitional’ nature of the event it denotes (hence a frequent rendering by ‘attempt’ or ‘try’).⁴⁰ (82) illustrates a periphrastic irrealis pattern in Bininj Gun-wok combined with reduplication (cf. the irrealis-avertive particle *yimankek*), but a plain past indicative marking is also possible, cf. (80); it is followed by an adversative clause contextually specifying the failure meaning. Sentential negation (as in (84)–(85)) can also appear on the right edge of reduplicated clause, thus forming an ‘elliptic’ negative clause, and in effect, a special type of avertive structure—we will focus on such structures in Section 6.4.4.

(82) birri-yah-yame-ng yimankek Ø-warreh-warrewo-ng. (Bininj Gun-wok)
3ap-INCEP-spear-PFV CTRFAC 3P-ITER-wreck-PFV
‘They tried spearing Ngalyod, but kept missing.’ (Evans 2003: 381)

³⁹ Cf. Ngarla *nguru-nguru* ‘almost immersed’ (Westerlund 2015: 165).

⁴⁰ It can also be found with irrealis marked verbs in Bininj Gun-wok.

(83) barri-yah-yame-ng gunj, barri-warreh-warrewo-ng. (Bininj Gun-wok)

3a/3P-INCEP-spear-PFV kangaroo 3a/3P-ITER-miss-PFV

‘They tried to spear the kangaroo but they kept missing it.’ (Evans 2003: 381)

(84) darordam-tha raa-ja warirr (Kayardild)

break-REDUP-ACT spear-ACT nothing

‘(They) tried spearing (him) but in vain (= nothing happened).’ (Evans 1995: 290)

(85) yi-rr-ma-WIRRI-WIRRIGA-nydyi-na mandya walı... maļu .. mirri (Nyikina)⁴¹

3-nmin-INT_P-try-try_S-INT_S-PST many animal NEG .. certain

‘Many creatures tried and tried... no luck at all’ (Stokes 1982: 287)

Bininj Gun-wok stands out in our sample, as it is the only language to possess a special morphological reduplication pattern for averitivity (glossed INCEP in (82) and (83)), which seems to have both inceptive and iterative readings; it seems to mean something like ‘keep on beginning, keep on being about to’. Interestingly, affixes with an inceptive-iterative meaning can also be found in other languages of our samples, and those also have averitive interpretations, cf. e.g. the Arrernte *-elp* ‘continuous inception’ suffix (‘keep beginning, be on the brink of’). It was already mentioned in [Section 6.4.2](#) as a case of proximative affix, but ([Wilkins 1989](#): 261–262) primarily analyses it as a reduplication

⁴¹ INT_P / INT_S are valency-related affixes.

marker. It is cognate (Hercus 1994: 201) with the Arapana stem-forming suffix *-alpa* ‘not quite’, which also has avertive uses. In any case, such datapoints show that the boundaries between some of the patterns here listed can be quite porous, by illustrating the strong semantic overlap between reduplication, imperfectivity and proximativity—and their tendency to have converging development paths towards avertive meanings.

Last but not least, a special type of intonation indicating a marked temporal duration (i.e. meaning something like ‘for a long time’) can also appear both with and without reduplication to convey a protracted, and therefore vain attempt. The relevant intonation is glossed as ‘::’ in (86); it is quite common across Australian languages, and tends to mark the final syllable of the verb phrase.⁴² Again, the failure of the attempt seems to be discursively indicated by an adversative clause (*w-ardajb-ung*, ‘he wasn’t able / failed to break it’).

(86)	r-urlukba-n::	w-ardajb-ung	(Iwaidja)
	3m.sg>3sg.ANT-step.on-ANT::	3sg.ANT-couldn’t.break it-ANT	
	‘He repeatedly tried (= tried hard) to break it with his foot but failed.’ (Caudal and Mailhammer, forthcoming 2022)		

6.4.4 Avertive pattern no. 4: V-IRR/V-IMPERF + NEG as conventionalized constructions

The fourth avertive pattern in our list involves any of the previously listed avertivity structures, or an indicative past utterance, followed by an isolated negative particle or clitic. It can be found with synthetic (87)–(89) or periphrastic irrealis-avertive marking (90), as well as with plain past indicative verbs combined with avertivity-inducing markings

⁴² See e.g. Simard’s (2013) conception of ‘iconic lengthening’, or Caudal and Mailhammer’s (forthcoming 2022) ‘linear lengthening intonation’.

as in e.g. (91) (reduplication or other iterative expressions, especially combined with a durative intonation, i.e. proximative/imperfective meanings, therefore possibly endowed with a modal dimension, cf. [Section 6.4.3](#)).

(87) bariyoondirni marlami bithami (Goonyiandi)

he:might:have:climbed not he:got:stiff

‘He tried to climb up, but couldn’t. He was too stiff.’ ([McGregor 1990](#): 533)

(88) yatha nga-b-irriga-na mangarra dempa damarlung (Jaminjung)

alright 1sg:3sg- POT:COOK-IMPF plant.food damper nothing

‘I was going to/wanted to bake bread all right, damper, (but) nothing (i.e. I didn’t)’ ([Schultze-](#)

[Berndt 2000](#): 93)

(89) ayana-wu-ni ba karlu (Iwaidja)

1sg>3pl.PCF-hit-PCF but NEG

‘I was going to hit them/I nearly hit them, but I didn’t.’ ([Caudal and Mailhammer 2021](#))

(90) nungka yimankek Ø-dulubu-yi bulikki, dja burrkyak-ni. (Bininj Gun-wok)

he CTRFAC 3P-shoot-IRR bullock but nothing-IMPF

‘He tried to shoot the bullock, but nothing.’ ([Evans 2003](#): 374)

(91) waran:: karlu marukurnaj riwidariny. (Iwaidja)

3sg.ANT-go.on-ANT:: NEG indef.PRO 3sg.MA>3sgO-ANT-fail-ANT

‘He went on for a while but nothing. He failed at whatever he was doing.’ (Caudal and Mailhammer,

forthcoming)

Such patterns are very common in our sample (ten languages out of seventeen possess them)—but they might well be more widespread than the present survey suggests. I will analyse them as reduced forms of so-called ‘adversative structures’ à la Malchukov (2004) (see also Plungian’s 2001 notion of *antiresultatives*, which establishes a clear connection between avertives and biclausal adversatives). Contrary to discursively construed adversatives structures exemplified in our type 1 examples, the adversative clause is here reduced to a simple negative item standing for a whole negative clause—I will therefore call it a reduced negative clause.

Like periphrastic inflectional avertive patterns (type 2), and unlike synthetic inflectional avertive patterns (type 1), they conventionally convey avertivity in the sense that they constitute at least ‘rhetorical routines’ à la (Detges and Waltereit 2002)—or possibly syntactic constructions. In support of a constructional analysis, it can be observed that their phonological properties require a drop followed by a pause before the negation, which suggests a two-clause structure. Syntactically, they may lack overt syntactic material (conjunctions or discourse connectives) marking the boundary of the reduced clause, a property reminiscent of (Hale 1976)’s ‘adjoined relative clauses’ in Australian languages, and in general, of so-called ‘clause chaining’ in these languages.

It should be stressed that reduced negative clauses abound outside of such avertive structures. They can express emphatic negation (albeit with a different phonological structure), when the previous clause is already negative; the second negation then reinforces the first (‘not at all’), (92).

(92) minj djama barri-yawoih-na-yi gayakki (Bininj Gun-wok)

NEG not ya/3PST-again-see-IRR nothing

‘And no-one ever saw (Daddubbe) again’ (Evans 2003: 624)

Reduced negative clauses are often associated with resumptive, anaphoric negations with VP ellipsis (93) (here tantamount to a clause-level ellipsis), even multiple anaphoric negations, cf. *gayakki* and *marrek* in (94)—again, we seem to be dealing with a two-clause construction.

(93) nanibu barri-ganj-ngune-ng, dja nanibu gayakki (Bininj Gun-wok)

MA:PROX.SER.pl 3a/3PST-meat-eat-PFV CONJ MA:PROX.SER.pl nothing

‘Some of them ate the meat, and some of them didn’t.’ (Evans 2003: 306)

(94) djama ba-ngu-yi njamed, gayakki, marrek (Bininj Gun-wok)

not 3/3IPST-eat-IRR anything, nothing, not

‘He didn’t eat anything, he had nothing to eat.’ (Evans 2003: 283)

While negations are arguably particles in most Australian languages, these patterns stand apart from the periphrastic type 2 avertive patterns, due to their different phonological and syntactic properties.

6.4.5 Avertive pattern no. 5: ‘Partitive culminations’ as an avertive strategy

Let us now turn to the fifth and last type of avertive structure found in the sample. The term ‘partitive culminations’, or PC, will here refer to so-called non-culminating accomplishments (Bar-El, Davis, and Matthewson 2006) and non-

culminating achievements, i.e. past telic utterances with some tense associated (at least contextually) with a past perfective meaning, but for which culmination is not warranted, or at least defeasible.⁴³ While most of the existing literature (cf. e.g. [Martin and Demirdache 2020](#); [Altshuler 2014](#)) tends to argue that only the latter, and not the former, are possible, other works suggests that non-culminating achievements are indeed attested crosslinguistically, as is clearly the case in e.g. Hindi (95) ([Arunachalam and Kothari 2011](#)) or Mandarin (96). Similar examples can be found in Australian languages, cf. (97) is a clear instance of such a reading in Mawng:

(95) maya-ne kamiiz taang-ii par vah tangii (Hindi)
 Maya-ERG shirt hang-PERF but it-ACC hung
 nahiin
 not
 ‘Maya hung the shirt, but it didn’t get hung.’ (Kothari 2008)

(96) Xu Mei he Sun Mazi ba Lao Luo sha le mei sha-si (Mandarin)
 Xu Mei and Sun Mazi BA Lao Luo kill PERF not kill-die
 ‘Xu Mei and Sun Mazi killed Lao Luo but didn’t make him die.’ ([Koenig and Chief 2008](#))

⁴³ For a now ‘traditional’ definition of perfective vs imperfective aspect, cf. e.g. [Smith \(1991\)](#); for a formal, discourse-oriented one, see [Caudal \(2012\)](#).

(97) malany nungpak-apa inyng-ikp-ung. (Mawng)
 CONJ THAT.EMPH 3GEN/3F-wake-PST.

‘Then she tried to wake the other one up.’ (Singer et al. 2015: 56)

Biclausal PC constructions with reduced negative clauses constructions are also found in the sample, cf. e.g. (98)–(99).

They are probably under-represented in the data I garnered through grammar mining, as PCs were only recently identified as a linguistic category of interest, especially since due to their simplicity, such structures have an innocuous, run-of-the-mill feeling to them, authors may tend to omit them in their grammatical investigations.⁴⁴

(98) dathin-a wir-di-j, bala-tha ni, warirr (Kayardild)
 there-NOM stay-ACT hit-ACT 3sgNOM nothing

‘He stayed there and pounded the bait (to attract fish with its grease). Nothing [= he didn’t catch any fish’.
 (Evans 1995: 299)

(99) milalimi marlami (Gooniyandi)
 I:looked not

‘I looked, but didn’t find it.’ (McGregor 1990: 495)

⁴⁴ My intuition is also based on the observation that I have very often encountered such structures while doing fieldwork on Iwaidja and Anindilyakwa, in ordinary verbal exchanges, and initially did not pay very much attention to such data points.

At least two languages in the sample have a clear weak vs. strong perfective tenses opposition: Anindilyakwa (REAL-V-Ø has weak perfective, PC readings (100), whereas REAL-V-PST is an underspecified past tense with ‘strong’ perfective readings, and does not license PC readings (101)) and Kayardild (V-ACT also has strong perfective readings, whereas V-PST has weak, PC-readings).

(100) n-alyubaru-nu=ma y-akina yinumaninga (Anindilyakwa)

REAL.3M-eat-PST=CTYP MA-that MA.food

akena nara kin-alyubari-na

but NEG IRR.3M>MA-eat-PST

‘He began to eat the wild apple, but didn’t finish it’ (Bednall 2020: 206)

(weak perfective; partitive culmination—event began but failed to culminate)

(101) *n-alyubaru-Ø=ma y-akina yinumaninga (Anindilyakwa)

3M-eat-USP=CTYP MA-that MA.food

akena nara kin-alyubari-na

but NEG IRR.3M>MA-eat-PST

* ‘He began to eat the wild apple, but he didn’t finish it.’ (Bednall 2020: 206)

(strong perfective; *partitive culmination—event has to culminate)

Interestingly, while the weak tense is the least temporally specific in Anindilyakwa (REAL-V-Ø), the reverse holds true in Kayardild (-ACT is aspectuo-temporally underspecified, but can have ‘strong’ perfective readings); so underspecification plays no part in determining weak vs. strong perfective readings of tenses. The real explanation, I

believe, lies in tenses still being *relative/content dependent* vs *absolute* to some extent.⁴⁵ I will here claim that ACT (in Kayardild) and REAL-V-Ø are in fact *dependent, relative* tenses, in a syntactic sense. In Kayardild, ACT cannot mark past subordinate clauses (Evans 1995: 261)—only PAST can. Similarly, the temporal interpretation of REAL-V-Ø subordinates or ‘chained clauses’ in Anindilyakwa depends on that of their matrix clause, whereas that of REAL-V-PST subordinates/‘chained clauses’ does not (Bednall 2020).

Before closing this subsection, it is important to note that bare PC structures, and generally discourse-dependent PCs (100)–(101) (‘pragmatic’ PCs, column 11 in Table 6.2), differ crucially from both other avertives of the sample, in that (i) they do not contribute a negative event contradicting an attempt/belief/expectation per se, and are utterly deprived of any inherent modal-evidential content (those are at best instances of ‘free’ pragmatic enrichment) and therefore (ii) they do not describe complex event structures, a part of which is modalized. In other words, they are at best ‘weak’ avertive strategies (see Müller 2013: 106 for a related observation concerning South American Indigenous languages). And I take conventionalized PC-looking constructions with a reduced negative clause (column 10) as bridging the gap between pragmatic PCs and *bona fide* semantic avertives reviewed so far: I classify PC+NEG patterns as semantically avertive structures since they encode a negative event; but they lack the modal-evidential content associated with other types of (semantic) avertives. I will come back to this crucial fact in my theoretical conclusion below.

6.4.6 Some key empirical generalizations about modal, aspectual, and actional and subtypes of avertives

The data discussed so far demonstrates that many avertives structures, marked or not with an irrealis-avertive inflection, come in different modal flavours: predictive/proximative (‘was going to V / would have V, but didn’t’—

⁴⁵ These tenses are classic cases of what N. Evans refers to ‘insubordination’ (Evans and Watanabe 2016)—or how a syntactically dependent tense came to mark matrix clauses—where the former dependent/relative tense has retained some of its semantic dependency. ‘Weak perfectivity’, I believe, is here preconditioned by this parameter. For a historical analysis of the Kayardild PAST along these lines, see Evans (1995: 443); and Mark Harvey (p.c.) suggests that the Anindilyakwa ‘null’ inflection is historically derived from a former (relative) imperfective.

where V is typically a non-agentive verb), predictive necessity ('X should_{physical/social/dispositional} have V, but didn't'), volitional ('X wanted to V/tried to V, but didn't'), capacitative ('X could have V/tried to V, but didn't') and some special flavour of deontic modals ('X should have V, but didn't')—which is essentially deontic modality pointing to a non-accessible world. I will call 'reproachatives' the latter type of deontic-based avertive (cf. [Olmen 2018](#)); see also 'admonitives' in [Harvey 2002](#)); they describe failures to meet a past obligation, and are typically used to blame an addressee. Doxastic and evidential avertives ('X thought that P/it seemed to X that P, but it turned out that non-P') are also attested in the language sample, though not for 'bare' irrealis-avertive inflections—they require additional particles. This suggests that avertives in Australian languages can have both a dynamic and a non-dynamic modal basis; a least some avertive structures are capable of both dynamic and non-dynamic modal (including evidential) readings (see (111)–(113) below). All in all, it appears that in Australian languages (i) both dynamic and non-dynamic modal meanings can underlie avertive structures, and that (ii) non-dynamic vs dynamic modal structures can be conventionalized separately, or not, though there seems to be tendency for them to appear in separate constructions.

Another important generalization with respect to modality should complement those put forth above: non-avertive irrealis meanings, i.e. non-avertive deontic, conditional and hypothetical meanings, all typically associated with forms pointing to the irrealis avertive cluster, do not seem to arise with doxastic/evidential avertive structures involving an evidential/doxastic or capacitative meaning; even volitional and proximative meanings can be absent from some avertive forms, which are clearly much less polyfunctional than those typical of the irrealis-avertive cluster. This is strongly indicative of the existence of seriously diverging development paths for avertives in Australian languages. It points to at least three distinct sets of development paths: one broadly related to the irrealis-avertive cluster (and associated with volitional/proximative-predictive modal meanings), one broadly related to negatively oriented evidential/doxastic meanings, and one to negative capacitative meanings. I will get back to this question in Section 6.5.

Turning to aspect, I will not discuss here in great detail the various aspectual subtypes of avertive meanings exhibited (or not) in the sample by each of these patterns, mostly for want of a sufficient number of datapoints to effectively be able to do so. But based on language where data is most abundant, it seems that the three following generalizations hold (they extend beyond the irrealis-avertive cluster):

1. avertive structures, regardless of their nature, seem to require change-of-state, dynamic, and certainly non-stative verbs; whenever they combine with stative verbal roots, these receive a dynamic, teleological interpretation, with the target result being denied to the agent argument, i.e. a resultative avertive reading (they become endowed with a contextually determined ‘telos’/result stage, as in e.g. ‘X look for something’, ‘X wait for someone’, ‘X watch something’, i.e. verbs with lexically encoded telos, which I take to constitute a case of sublexical (teleological) modality, cf. Martin & Schäfer 2017);⁴⁶ and if a seemingly verb bears a so-called ‘inchoative’ derivational affix, which makes it ambiguous between a change-of-state reading and a stative reading, then the change-of-state reading must prevail. As for activity verbs, they seem to receive some sort of teleological, telic-like contextual enrichment (as their lexical entry lacks any teleological sublexical modality) as well when used in avertive contexts—but further investigations are clearly required to make this more specific
2. proximative/imperfective-related avertives in Australian languages tend to have either a full event/preparatory stage avertive reading (‘X wanted / was going to V’; prospective/proximative aspect) or inner stage avertive reading (‘X was V-ing, but did not finish V-ing’), but not a result stage avertive reading (‘X V-ed, but expected results did not obtain’). I will claim that this is a predictable consequence of the fact that the verb’s underlying event predicate cannot culminate, due to the proximative/imperfective or iterative morphology involved
3. perfective avertives and PC-avertives in Australian languages tend to have any of the main aspectual types of avertive readings; perfective achievement utterances can only have full event or resultative avertive readings.

Finally, let us consider the actional parameters underlying avertives in the sample. I did not find clear evidence for a principled distinction between ‘subject-controlled avertives’ (i.e. frustratives in my terminology) and ‘non-subject

⁴⁶ Hale (1969): 208) offers similar activity-based examples (e.g. ‘look around for’), which must possess a lexically encoded telos/goal (e.g. a ‘finding’ event in the case of ‘look for’); but even if they don’t, it seems that some agent-controlled activities can be contextually enriched with such a telos.

controlled avertives’, both within and without irrealis-avertive cluster-type languages. Inflectional, pragmatic avertives in the sample did not seem to be biased towards either of these two readings—though of course, volitional-leaning interpretations were mostly restricted to animate subjects; in the absence of a controlling subject, a predictive/proximative reading seems to prevail, and the associated private state is ascribed to the speaker, and/or to some contextual judge (this is particularly obvious for irrealis-avertives with an evidential, ‘not what it seems’ meaning). The actional semantics of particle-based avertives is often more delicate to assess, in the absence of sufficient data. This question, therefore, will have to be settled by future research.

6.5 Conclusion: Theoretical consequences of the survey

I must now come back full circle, and attempt to answer my initial research questions: are positive versus negative utterances separated by a clear ontological split, or do avertive structures somehow bridge the gap between actual and inactual events? And what can avertivity tell us about how the human mind (as evidenced by linguistic systems), structures time? I will first focus on so-called avertive development paths in Australian languages ([Section 6.5.1](#)), before striving to identify important theoretical consequences of this study for our understanding of avertives as a general linguistic category, and beyond that, for a theory of time as construed from structured events ([Section 6.5.2](#)). I will then proceed to drawing some possible consequences for language typology ([Section 6.5.3](#)), before concluding ([Section 6.5.4](#)).

6.5.1 Development paths and cognitive underpinnings: Where do avertive come from, and how are they semantically/pragmatically structured?

Given the results garnered through the analysis of our language sample, I will argue that several distinct development paths can be identified for Australian avertive structures, depending on whether they involve imperfective-proximative meanings (6.5.1.1), volition and other dynamic modal meanings (6.5.1.2), or simulative/evidential meanings (6.5.1.3).

6.5.1.1 From imperfectivity-proximativity to avertivity: The predominant set of development paths for avertivity in Australian languages

As we have seen, numerous proximative-leaning elements (imperfective or modal morphology whose meaning can be proximative ‘be about to/be going’, ‘almost, nearly’ affixes, clitics, particles or adverbials, reduplication) appear in avertive constructions. Could those different classes of proximative patterns have followed related development paths—in the sense of [Bybee, Perkins, and Pagliuca \(1994\)](#)—with or without a *bona fide* imperfective content? If that is the case, then a vastly predominant family of closely related development paths emerges from our areal study.

The fact that proximative-avertive meanings (‘X was going to V, but didn’t’) appear with both indicative (imperfective, or aspectually underspecified) past morphology as well with modal, irrealis inflections (cf. the *kuyin*-preverb in Bininj Gun-wok), is strongly suggestive that imperfectivity *per se* is not a necessary ingredient of the development path. Having a ‘part-of’ semantics⁴⁷ might explain why imperfectives often develop proximative (‘be about to’, ‘be going to’) meanings crosslinguistically. The effect of proximative adverbials as essentially quantitative expressions (‘was at a point near completion/inception/obtention of results’ (imperfective), or ‘came close to completion/inception/obtention of results’ (perfective)) in avertive contexts is similar, regardless of the viewpoint involved: both imperfectives and proximative adverbials indicate that the event denoted is somehow incomplete. Either the event as a whole, or its culmination or its results—some event part is somehow lacking. This would give us two closely related, partially overlapping development paths, (102)–(103). Given the present sample with its prominent proximative/volitional dimension of irrealis-avertive clusters (column 5 in Table 6.5), it seems natural to assume that the shift from a non-proximative past imperfective, to a proximative imperfective corresponds to a volitional modal enrichment of the inflection. It can only arise if it is compatible with telic verbs (see the Murrinh-Patha past imperfective for an instance of imperfective inflection incompatible with telic verbs, and logically lacking a proximative

⁴⁷ Cf. e.g. [\(Altshuler 2014\)](#) for a relatively recent ‘part-of’ relation based formal analysis of imperfectives—though the idea is fairly ancient; for the Romanist tradition, it dates back at least to G. Guillaume’s work between the two world wars [\(Guillaume and Vassant 1992\)](#).

interpretation). I will hypothesize that is a consequence of telic verbs possessing a sublexical modal content, of a teleological/volitional type, which becomes singled-out by the proximative meaning extension.

(102) The past tense + proximative development path

Past tense + proximative adjunct ('almost, nearly') > past avertive-counterfactual (CF)

(103) The (past) imperfective/proximative to avertive development path:

Past ipfv. > Past ipfv/proximative/volitional > prox./volitional/irrealis/avertive

I am arguing here for a type of evolution conjoining two types of mechanisms. The first is meaning accretion, that is the coexistence of ancient vs novel meanings at some evolution. This corresponds to 'layering' à la [Hopper \(1991\)](#), or a *bridging context* à la [Heine \(2002\)](#).⁴⁸ (103) means that I am arguing that the original past imperfective meaning of an inflection was shed *after* it developed into a form possessing at once proximative, volitional, irrealis, and avertive meanings—which, of course, corresponds to the Northern Australian irrealis-avertive cluster. This hypothesis is supported by independent diachronic analyses for some languages in the sample, as at least some irrealis-avertive non-Pama-Nyungan paradigms can be reconstructed as derived from former imperfective paradigms, as in e.g.,

⁴⁸ Note that if the volitional/proximative ingredients came to vanish, this could lead to the formation of a narrower irrealis-avertive—and with further shedding, to a pure avertive or irrealis (such as I think, the Kunbarlang past irrealis, which does not seem to have proximative/volitional or avertive readings). This would be a case of *switch* in [Heine's \(2002\)](#) theory; cf. also path (102), where the second stage illustrates a switch case à la [Heine \(2002\)](#).

Gunwinyguan,⁴⁹ or in Maningrida languages.⁵⁰ Furthermore, I believe the past imperfective path proposed above is in line with diachronic-typological work such as (Sansò 2020) (see in particular the ‘be’ development path).

It should also be stressed that forms on path (102) differ crucially from those on path (103) in that the former initially entail, and eventually denote negative semantic content as at-issue meaning, whereas the latter often convey such negative content as defeasible negative implicatures, becoming possibly attached later on to a secondary, non-at issue dimension of meaning. The development of counterfactual/negative event meaning from proximative adjuncts is already well-known from the history of English (Ziegeler 2000, 2015), and similar evolutions might very well have taken place in Australian languages. Furthermore, treating the negative import of (103) as a matter of non-at issue (and possibly defeasible) content is consistent with the widely held view in the literature that past irrealis forms convey defeasible negative implicatures—or presuppositions at most (Ippolito 2003, 2006; Arregui 2009), including the Australianist literature (Verstraete 2005, 2006; Van Linden and Verstraete 2008)—not downright semantic (especially not at issue) negative content. This also explains why such pragmatically construed avertive interpretations (in effect ‘avertive strategies’) contrast with those ‘marked’, semantically avertive constructions in the irrealis, involving additional, overt negative elements (avertive/proximative particles, or reduced negative clauses) in this respect.

If the two development paths put forth above are correct, then it follows that proximativity always has potential for an avertive-irrealis development regardless of the associated aspectual viewpoint, because it can always lead to a counter-to-fact, negative enrichment—this is consistent with independent typological regularities (cf. e.g. the

⁴⁹ As noted in (Alpher, Evans, and Harvey 2003: 312); (Kapitonov 2019: 173), the predominant Gunwinyguan past irrealis paradigm /nij/can be reconstructed as past imperfective.

⁵⁰ (Green 1995: 195 ff.; 2003: 399) reconstructs the Gurr-goni irrealis inflection *-rni* as derived from a proto-Maningrida root **ni/*nu* ‘sit’. ‘Sit’ being a notorious copula in Australian languages, (Sansò 2020: 416, n. 6) argues that it most likely developed into some progressive (with proximative uses), and from there, into an irrealis. It should be noted, furthermore, that *-ni* sounds very much like a common pan-Australian root for ‘sit’, and that several past suffixes possibly derive from it (cf. e.g. Anindilyakwa, Jaru, Ngarla).

development of some Romance conditionals from imperfectively-marked modal constructions, or the Romanian dedicated avertive construction *a fi pe cale* (Pahonțu forthcoming), which admits both perfective and imperfective marking).⁵¹

Reduplication/iterative morphology, which we have seen to be frequent in our inventory of imperfective-proximate avertive patterns (Section 6.4.3), requires two sub-development paths given in (104): the general reduplication/iteration type (104.1) branches out on the more general imperfective pattern, while the inceptive-reduplication type (104.2) behaves more like a proximate adverbial like ‘nearly’; as we have seen in [Section 6.4.3](#), there is substantial semantic overlap between inceptive-iterative and proximate meanings.

(104) The reduplication/iteration to avertive sub-development paths

- | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Reduplication/iteration | > | proximate/volitional (‘keep trying’) | > | ... |
| 2. Inceptive reduplication | > | proximate | > | avertive-counterfactual |

While reduplication and iterative morphology has so far not been mentioned as a major source of avertive markers cross-linguistically *via* the proximate/imperfective path, it seems to be widely attested across languages of the world. For the Americas, see e.g., [Hintz \(2011\)](#): 68–69) for related datapoints in Quechua; (105) is a clear example of reduplication-based avertive structure in South Conchucos Quechua. For Europe, see e.g. Moksha Mordvin, an Uralic (Mordvinic) language, which possesses an avertive (‘almost’) suffix derived from an iteration/habituality suffix ([Kozlov \(2019\)](#): 133)), and Russian, where instances of reduplication strikingly reminiscent of a similar inceptive-avertive reduplication pattern can be found (106).

⁵¹ It is my belief that *a fi pe cale* has just entered a bridging context phase ([Heine 2002](#)) between the two stages of (91).

(105) tsa cha-yka-mu-r-qa qechu-na:llapa-n (South Conchucos Quechua)

that arrive-PFV.O-DIST-SS-TOP

take.force-PST

mu:la-n-ta.

wanu-tsi-ypa

wanu-na:

all-3 mule-3-Odie-CAUS-ADV die-PST

‘Then when he arrived, he took away all of his brother’s mules and tried to kill him (in any way possible).’

(Hintz 2011: 74)

(106) Sneg tajal, tajal, no ne (Russian)

Snow melt.IPFV.PST

melt.IPFV.PST

but

NEG

rastajal.

melt.PFV.PST

‘The snow started to melt but did not melt away completely.’

6.5.1.2 Volition and other dynamic and interpersonal modal bases giving rise to irrealis-avertive development paths in Australia

As shown by column 6, most irrealis-avertive inflections have a volitional interpretation in their development path.

This connection between volitionality and avertivity is hardly a surprise, as the volitional development path of avertives is well-known from Kuteva’s (1998) seminal paper; it is crosslinguistically abundant, in Europe, in Africa, and in the Americas—cf. e.g. García Salido (2014: 295–297) for multiple examples in Tepehuan, an Uto-Aztecan language, (107).

(107)	Tii ba-tu-aski-ch-dha'-iñ	pu	cham matit	(Tepehuan)
	INT.NR CMP-DUR-bag-CAUS-APPL-1sg.SBJ	SENS	NEG	know.PFV
	ti-tirbiñ-dha'-iñ	ja'p	añ	chii bua-da'
	RED:ITER-fold-APPL-1sg.SBJ	DIR	1sg.SBJ	INT.NR make-CONT

'I wanted to make bags, but I did not know how to fold the threads, I intended to do it, (but I could not).'

(García Salido 2014: 295)

A volitional development path complementary of (103) is proposed in (108), as the avertive function of former imperfectives might have derived directly from said volitional meaning as well.⁵² It is based on the uncertain outcome initially associated with volitionals—indeed, given a neutral volitional only contextual information will indicate whether an agent's desire was granted or thwarted by subsequent circumstances (cf. English verb *want*). But again, most forms found in the sample seem associated with some form of defeasible, but nevertheless salient (and therefore conventionalized) failure implicature (hence speakers' uneasiness, sometimes, at granting them positive outcomes)—i.e. are one step beyond a simple volitional verb giving rise to a conversational implicature.

(108) The volitional development bath ('wanted but NO'):

volition (uncertain outcome) > (defeasible) implicature of failure > avertive (semanticized)

⁵² It contrasts with Kuteva's (1998) proposed path, (15), in that proximativity being obviously a previously developed meaning (a basic meaning of imperfectives combined with telic verbs, including non-agentive ones) according to my analysis, volitionality must intervene later on.

However, I will argue that proximative meanings also constitute a potential modal base, of a doxastic-predictive nature – they encode a high degree of expectation about some imminent event in the past (i.e., a past belief concerning ulterior worlds); see e.g. the role played by the notion of inertia in Carol & Salanova (2017)—I take futures in general to encode similar modal bases. In the absence of an agentive subject, volitional/proximative avertive structures will take on such a doxastic-predictive modal flavour (whereby some expected ulterior event did not materialize).

As for negative ability markers such as *putu* in Western Desert languages (as in Yankunytjatjara, cf. [Goddard 1983](#):163, and Pintupi-Luritja, cf. [Rose 2001](#):70–71—see also other cognate forms in neighbouring language families, e.g. Pilbara languages), it should be observed that capacity modals are known to easily evolve towards volitional and directive meanings (this is a common development path in SAE languages, for instance), and in general towards agentive exertion readings (‘try’).⁵³ In combination with negative polarity, these exertion readings can naturally give rise to avertive meanings (‘X tried to V but did not V’). Note that *purtukarri* in Ngarla (Pilbara), which can convey both negative capacity and negative volition (‘unwillingly’), suggests indeed a complex relation between volition, capacity, and negative polarity—and in such a case, the event described by the verb is not averted; what gets negated is an underlying volitional modal base.

Even independently from Australian facts, capacity modals seem to give rise to avertive meanings by being interpreted as describing an event of exerting one’s ability (i.e. trying and failing to realize it); this is evidenced by e.g. negative capacity modals (or negated capacity modals) found in Romance or Germanic languages (cf. e.g. English ‘X was unable/was not able to V’ *qua* ‘X tried and failed to V’ negative capacitative avertives). To that effect, the underlying ability modal must be capable of having not just generic, dispositional readings, but also stage-level, non-permanent readings (cf. the related notion of ‘action dependent ability’ in [Mari and Martin 2008](#))—a perfect fit for a change-of-state, avertive interpretation. In an utterance like (56), I take the ‘couldn’t’ rendering of *putu* as an illustration of such a failed, deliberate/volitional exertion at realizing such an ‘action dependent ability’.

⁵³ I will get back to this below, when addressing capacity modal verb *pouvoir* (‘be able’) in French, and its relation with avertivity and other postmodal meanings, i.e. so-called actuality entailments.

And of course, what I have called reproachative avertives (Section 6.4.6) (‘you should have V [but you didn’t]’) being related to deontic, i.e. priority modal meanings (Portner 2018), they are potentially deeply connected to volitionals (thus, ‘I want you to V’ can contextually implicate ‘you must V’), and could be part of a semantically extended path encompassing (108).

6.5.1.3 The simulative/evidential development path

The last major grouping of development paths I would like to propose involves simulative counterfactual (‘like’) expressions, and in general forms possessing, or having developed a negative epistemic/evidential/doxastic content, cf. *yimarne(k)/yimanke(k)* in Bininj Gun-wok and Kunbarlang, *djangagogo* and *djaying* in Bininj Gun-wok. The avertive structures in which these markers appear routinely negative modal meanings, and often reflect on failed expectations and unjustified beliefs.

Many of these expressions derive from roots/affixes/clitics whose original meaning was ‘like’/‘seem/not what it seems’. They sometimes incorporate an overt negative element—as in Warlpiri.⁵⁴ These forms frequently aggregate negative evidential-doxastic meanings (‘not what it seemed to agent/what agent believed’), occasionally mirative meanings (see Delancey Scott 2012), and capacity meanings (‘can’t’/‘couldn’t’).⁵⁵ I will not attempt to account for the latter fact, and will focus on the former, as the negative capacity meaning could be inherently associated with negation in some languages. Thus, the *kula* negation, common in Ngumpin-Yapa languages, seems to be imbued with a negative capacity meaning, as is evidenced from its uses in Jaru and Walmajarri (McConvell and Laughren 2004: 163–164).

Let us take an example to illustrate the path. *Yiman* is a simulative element in Bininj Gun-wok; similatives easily develop into negative expressions, such as past irrealis/counterfactuals, and indeed, avertives (for a straightforward

⁵⁴ Note that Djaru, another Ngumpin-Yapa language, possesses a related negative evidential particle *kulanga*, see Tsunoda (1981: 205).

⁵⁵ I believe Western Desert *putu* (‘can’t/couldn’t’) pertains to another development path, as it does not have evidential undertones; see Section 6.5.1.2

illustration, see the evidential and irrealis/modal evolution of *like* ('X's is like P') in Modern English, cf. 'as e.g.' (Pinson 2020), or *as* ('as if'). This gives us development path (109). In our sample, one can also put forth Kayardild *maraka*, with its counterfactual, mistaken thought, and evidential meanings ('looked like'); *maraka* is also originally a similative, 'like' particle,⁵⁶ as shown by entries *bilulurlda*, *jurdungaji*, and *kabanda* in Evans (1995: 652, 692, 693).

(109)	Development path from similatives to evidential/irrealis/avertive/mistaken/thought		
	>	(positive/neutral evidential) : seems P (and is/might be P)	
like P	>	(negative evidential): seems P but is not P > evidential >	irrealis
			/avertive/mistaken
			thoughts/mirative

The above development path seems quite common in Australia, cf. other similative-derived avertives such as the irrealis/avertive particle *karaddiabb(a)* in Nakkara (Maningrida), derived from *djabba* 'like' (see Eather 2011: 340–343), or the Pitta-Pitta avertive particle *wiri* ('like') (see Blake 1979b: 220), a.o.⁵⁷

Finally, other particles and clitics such as Warlpiri *kula-nganta* (NEG+SEEM), the related Gurinji *-nganda* (probably cognate with 'dubitative' =*nga* clitic in Bilinarra) possibly illustrate a related (sub)path (110), directly starting from a

⁵⁶ See also the related Lardil particle *mara*, appearing with proximative-avertive meanings ('was going to V but didn't') with the FUT (= IRR) inflection, cf. Evans (1995: 381).

⁵⁷ I even suspect that similatives are in fact a very common source for avertives crosslinguistically, cf. Creissels et al. (2007: 106) for an instance of a similative-derived ('like') avertive in Tswana, a Niger-Congo language.

‘counter to expectation or belief/ doubtful/not what it seems’ meaning—see also *wurrkany* in Iwaidja (‘not what it seemed’), which signals a negative evidential, unexpected turn of events.⁵⁸

(110) The negative evidential development path (‘not what it seemed’):

- > irrealis (from ‘what seems’ to ‘what is’)
- (misleading) appearance > counter to expectations/belief > avertive
- > mistaken thought
- > mirative

Formally speaking, all doxastic/evidential avertive readings found in the sample (‘mistaken belief/perception’: ‘speaker/it was thought/it seemed that P, but that turned out to be wrong’) appear to require a dedicated avertive particle, plus either an irrealis-avertive inflection or an indicative past tense inflection; cf. *djaying* in Bininj Gun-wok, (111), *kula-ngnanta* in Warlpiri (112), *thaddi* in Gooniyandi (113), *wurrkany* in Iwaidja, etc.; the resulting structures are therefore specialized, semantic avertives.

(111) *djaying* *ba-ra-yinj gurih.* (Bininj Gun-wok)

supposedly 3 P-go-IRR there

I thought he was going to go that way (but he didn’t).’ (Evans 2003: 374)

⁵⁸ This is exactly what the Iwaidja dictionary mentions in its entry, and what R. Mailhammer and I found during field work explorations of the semantics of *wurrkany*. See also note 89.

(112) kula.nganta-kapi-rna wawirri panti-ka-rla, (kala lawa). (Warlpiri)

NEG.SEEM-FUT-I kangaroo spear-IRR (but no)

‘I thought I was going to spear the kangaroo, but I didn’t.’ (Nash 1980: 239)

(113) thaddi thilmangga bijginyjarnirmi (Gooniyandi)

mistakenly:believed early you:could:have:come ‘I thought you would arrive early.’

(McGregor 1990: 498)

In some cases, structures with an evidential/doxastic avertive flavour can also have a dynamic modal (generally volitional) avertive reading as well, see e.g. *mundjarra* in Gurr-goni (Burrara and Ndéjbbana offer similar datapoints (Green 1995: 315)), (114)–(115)). Intuitively, such cases probably involve a different development path—perhaps not unrelated to how epistemic/predictive modal meanings are derived from dynamic/root modal meanings, as in e.g. English *must*, *could*, or *would*.

(114) mundjarra njina-boy-Ø ngayi-pu arrapu Daryl (Gurr-goni)

supposedly 1UANfS-go-IRR2 IMin-Card and Daryl

wurpu burrkburk gu-me-ka.

but.just bad.sickness 3MinA.31VO-get-Con

‘Daryl and I intended to come (yesterday), but he got sick.’ (Green 1995: 314)

(115) mundjarra gabi police station mu-yo-rri+rni (Gurr-goni)
 supposedly LOC police station 3IIS-lie-IRR I

‘It was supposed to lie at the police station (said of a dead body which people had expected would be flown to Maningrida, but which was flown to an outstation instead).’ (Green 1995: 315)

Contrary to the doxastic/evidential avertive meanings we just discussed, the more straightforward ‘failed expectations’ readings we mentioned earlier in this subsection (cf. e.g. (116)) can be expressed by ‘bare’ irrealis-avertives, without additional particles. I take them to involve the same kind of doxastic-predictive modal bases: some (past) expectation of the speaker turns out not to be met. And in spite of what one might think at first sight, such readings are not really epistemic. They can even border on dispositional necessity meanings⁵⁹ (‘according to contextual (agents’ known habits, etc.) and non-contextual constraints (social/physical laws), it was necessary (and therefore predicted) that situation *s* should come to hold—but it didn’t’). I will therefore regard all those readings as cases of *doxastic-predictive modality*—which encompasses expectations based on physical and social necessity. Such a reading is routinely conveyed by *should* in English.⁶⁰ I will call such patterns *predictive* avertives, but will leave a more thorough theoretical characterization of their modal nature to future investigations. I take them to

(116) ya-la-(rr)-DI-na-da mabu (Nyikina)
 Insg-IRR-(nmin)-sit-PST-HAB good

⁵⁹ Such utterances do not merely imply that a certitude by an actually ignorant speaker turned out not to be verified, but that there are *practical* (physical, social) forces at play rendering a particular situation necessary. In this instance, it clearly inferred that something hampered them.

⁶⁰ Note that a weaker, non-necessity modal would not have been strong enough for its non-realization to be significant.

‘we should have been good (but we weren’t)’ (Green 1995: 281)

I must leave to future research the task of working out in finer details all those development paths, and some others I was compelled to omit for want of space to discuss them.

6.5.2 Consequences for a cognitive/semantic-pragmatic theory of avertivity, and our understanding of human time

Let me now turn to some important theoretical consequences of the discussion conducted in 6.5.1, namely the idea that (semanticized) avertives in Australian languages must contribute complex event structures comprising two separate event predicates (6.5.2.1) (one modal event predicate, and one negative even predicate), and that such meanings of avertive structures must constitute the negative counterpart of those conveying so-called ‘actuality entailments’ (6.5.2.2), thereby legitimating their perception as an important way of *negatively* construing the flow of time *qua* a succession of events.

6.5.2.1 Avertives as complex event structures, combining a positive and a negative event

If we summarize the findings we have made so far, it appears that conventionalized avertive expressions convey at least two events, one of which (no. 1) associates with a modal meaning:

1. a private cognitive state (intention—which turns out to be frustrated—or a belief/expectation (sometimes based on a perception)—which turns out to be mistaken (hence the connection between ‘mistaken thoughts’/evidentiality and avertivity, so striking in Australian languages with the irrealis-avertive cluster))—I am here treating the modal content of avertive structures as contributing stative events;⁶¹
2. (optionally) an event fragment, or an event minus its desired/expected results;

⁶¹ This is not an isolated or novel analysis of modals, cf. e.g. (Ferreira 2014).

3. a negative event ('event didn't begin/finish', 'results didn't obtain/hold'), whose very assertion contradicts that event 1 subsequently holds.

It must be stressed that no. 2 is indeed optional, as it can be reduced to nothing in contexts where the entirety of the propositional content of the avertive-marked verbs remains unrealized (cf. English *John almost died*); in such contexts a mere expectation (and possibly intention) event holds.

This means that fully semantic avertive structures convey *complex event predicates*, i.e. must combine at least two event predicates, and two (sub)event variables in their denotation: a private state event predicate (with a modal and/or evidential content) (no. 1), and a negative event predicate (derived from the semantic contribution of the avertive-marked verb) (no. 3).⁶² In addition, the above analysis, if it is correct, entails that avertives are the missing link between *bona fide* negative events (which, unsurprisingly tend to implicate an avertive reading, given the right context, 'he didn't stay' can easily implicate 'I expected/hoped/wanted him to stay') and positive events. It would then be a decisive argument in favour of the hypothesis that negative events *are* legitimate objects for a linguistic ontology of time, at the very least—and most probably, then, for any ontology of human time, even at an abstract, philosophical level.

It should be furthermore noted that this important philosophical question (i.e. do negative events have ontological substance?), has independently received a similar answer on purely theoretical, formal semantic grounds in (Bernard and Champollion 2018); although I cannot develop a formal implementation here, their treatment of negative events would be a perfect piece of machinery to include in such an implementation.

6.5.2.2 On the relation between so-called 'actuality entailments' and avertivity: Why avertive interpretations should be regarded as 'inactuality implications'

⁶² In contrast, languages where e.g. past irrealis inflections seem to defeasibly implicate a negative event (column no. 3 in Table 6.2), then no negative predicate should be part of their semantics; it is introduced by means of a lexical implicature—most certainly stemming from a former conversational implicature possibly associated with proximative meanings, given appropriate contexts.

The idea that positive and negative events are in fact very much like ‘opposite brothers’ within an extended semantic family, receives further substance if we consider how avertives are actually part of a larger class. Following an idea first (to the best of my knowledge) put forth in (Caudal 2018a, b), I believe that avertives cannot be well understood if one does not integrate them within such a larger categorial domain, which I will call eventualized postmodal meanings (EPMS), or more simply, demodals. I define EPMS/demodals as a class of expression with an at least partly postmodal content (in the sense of (van der [Auwera and Plungian 1998](#))). As argued above, I take semantic avertives as conveying complex event structures, comprising (a) a modalized event referent (a belief/expectation (grounded in a perception, or not), or a desire) paired up with and followed by (b) an event sanctioning either its failure/invalidity or success/validity—i.e. it can be a positive (in case of success) or negative (in case of failure). I will hypothesize that avertives (except PC+NEG structures, as they are not modalized/not EPMS) form the negative (failure) side of the EPM coin, while so-called ‘actuality entailments’ (cf. ([Bhatt 1999](#); [Hacquard 2009](#))), a.o.) form its positive side. I will therefore argue that avertives convey *inactuality entailments* (when semanticized), or, in the case of pragmatically defeasible avertive interpretations *inactuality implicatures*—in effect, avertive forms entail or implicate negative past events, depending on the form at stake.

Thus, (117) (as well as (119)) corresponds to the positive counterpart of many ‘failed attempt’ avertives in Australian languages—and the addition of a negation unsurprisingly yields an avertive reading, (118)—whose semantics is very similar to some Australian negative capacity-related avertives, such as *putu* in Yankunytjatjara. I believe that (120) is the positive counterpart of what I have called ‘reproachatives’ (cf. [Section 6.4.6](#)). Such utterances are typically rendered in grammars by a past deontic modal followed by an elliptic negative clause (‘you should have V-ed, but didn’t’). I will argue that although they are semantically close to SAE past counterfactual deontics, they differ from them in that they are EPMS; SAE past counterfactuals do not necessarily have a clear negative event meaning by themselves.⁶³

⁶³ What prompted me to adopt such an analysis was the somewhat bizarre abundance of seemingly unnecessary additions of ‘but X didn’t V’ clauses in the glosses of many irrealis-avertive inflections in grammars. I wondered—why did informants feel the

(117) Il a pu partir. (French)

He have.PR.3Sg be.capable.PP go-INF

‘He was able to leave.’ (= he managed to leave OR was allowed to leave OR seized an opportunity and left)

(118) Il n’a pas pu partir. (French)

He NEG.have-3sg.PR NEG be.able.to-PP leave-INF.

‘He failed/wasn’t able/couldn’t bring himself to leave.’

(119) Il a voulu partir. (French)

He have-PR.3sg want-PP leave-INF.

‘He tried to leave (and failed)’ (lit.: ‘he wanted_{perfective} to leave’)

(120) Il a dû partir. (French)

He have-3sg.PR have.to-PP leave-INF.

need for providing such translations? I now take it to be an indication that negative event implications are much more salient in Australian languages than in SAE languages for past irrealis forms, even with synthetic irrealis-averatives of type 1 (column 3 in [Table 6.2](#)).

‘He was compelled to leave’. (presupposes the agent is unwilling to act)

Additional evidence for grouping together actuality entailments (AEs) and avertives can be found in their relationship to epistemic modality. It has been frequently observed following Hacquard’s seminal work on AEs, that AEs are limited to action modals, i.e. to modals requiring dynamic, non-stative event predicates (cf. e.g. [Hacquard 2009](#)). Such a fact is in line with the observation made above that avertives do not associate with epistemic modal meanings (only doxastic modal and evidential meanings). I will get back to this issue further below, and provide a principled explanation.

The point just made above naturally leads to a central empirical and theoretical generalization concerning the relation between modality and avertivity. I have established that two main subtypes of modalized events, corresponding to two broad modal classes, are realized in the Australian data discussed above: dynamic vs. non dynamic modals. Most structures belonging to the first class give rise to an ‘exertion’, attempt reading, except what I have called reproachatives (based on deontic modal meanings), and are generally rendered using ‘tried [in vain]’ or ‘couldn’t/was unable to’. They are associated with capacity, volitional/(agentive) teleological modal meanings (and again, deontic modal meanings for reproachatives). The second class is associated with mistaken thoughts/beliefs-expectations/perceptions (doxastic-predictive modals and evidentials) and plain non-agentive proximatives (‘was about to but didn’t’, ‘nearly V-ed’) also reflecting on a simple failed expectation. They occasionally have extended meanings crosslinguistically associated with such semantic categories, e.g. mirative interpretations (see [Section 6.5.1.3](#)), and of course, they never incorporate an exertion event. They can only denote cognitive state events, as they are not so-called ‘action modals’; only avertive structures involving the latter type of modal meaning can become associated with some agentive attempt event.

In contrast to conventionalized avertives, I have also established that at least some irrealis inflections have a merely pragmatic avertive effect ([Section 6.4.1](#)), so that avertivity should be treated on several, distinct levels of a theory of meaning and time: in the semantics, or at the semantics/pragmatics interface. Again, such forms should be contrasted with their re-entrant uses in more conventionalized avertives such as e.g. what I have referred to as periphrastic irrealis-

avertive inflections (Section 6.4.2), as they have a semanticized avertive content, not to mention other conventionalized types of avertive constructions involving negations (Section 6.4.4). An open theoretical question at this point is whether these semanticized, former defeasible implicatures should be treated as conventional implicatures à la Potts (2005; 2007), i.e. using a multi-dimensional semantics, or as straightforward semantic content. This opens up further interesting avenues of research along the lines of several dimensions of meaning being associated with avertives.

Finally, I would like to stress that the pre-formal analysis sketched above differs from that of the *cem* avertive in Papago (Copley and Harley 2014) in substantial ways. Copley and Harley assume that accomplishment verbs are by default non-culminating in Papago (vPs do not encode a presupposition of efficaciousness, in their terms), unless some specific marker intervenes. The present theory diverges in that it does not consider that partitive culminations (PCs) should necessarily share with avertives a common semantic mechanism; I believe it to be rather unlikely, given the complexity, and specific properties (notably their multiple modal/evidential properties, which PCs lack), of the development paths of avertives. I rather regard PCs as a case of avertive strategy, distinct from *bona fide* avertives (my analysis is closer to Kroeger 2017 in that respect). Also, there appears to be some cross-linguistic variation as to the nature of e.g. avertive readings of irrealis inflections,⁶⁴ and—even more importantly—the distinction between

⁶⁴ As we have seen, Jaminjung and Iwaidja potentially differ on this. Speakers of Iwaidja seem rather inclined to consider irrealis avertives as at least having a failed reading by default—while the reverse holds true in the absence of avertive morphology/construction. But that does not seem to be the case in other languages, or this could depend on the kind of indicative morphology used; this complexity needs to be accounted for. Also, our observations about tense insubordination being a potential factor in the advent of PCs (as in Anindilyakwa and Kayardild, with their ‘weak perfective tenses’ being former dependent, relative tenses) suggest that PCs are probably not determined only by aspectuo(-causal) parameters (‘forces’ for Copley and Harley), but about aspectuo-*temporal* parameters (and so-called relative tenses), and therefore that focusing on culmination presupposition isn’t probably going to be sufficient. There is something deeper about the way those inflections are capable (or not) of contextual variation, than a culmination presupposition and a force-dynamics à la Copley and Harley.

‘emphatic’ vs ‘non-emphatic’ avertive structures suggest that Copley and Harley’s analysis would need at the very least to be enriched to apply to Australian languages. In my view, much of the problem at stake, as far as Australian languages are concerned, has to do with introducing a variety of types of multi-dimensionality in the semantic/pragmatic analysis (are these conventionalized implicatures something different in some cases and in others, etc.)—it is unlikely that a single theoretical solution can be applied to all cases, even in our relatively limited language sample. And whether or not Copley and Harvey’s solution is applicable to Australian languages largely depends on whether or not all languages possessing avertive structures allow for partitive culminations; it is far from obvious. At the very least, this is a matter to be settled as part of the semantics of inflectional morphology in some languages, rather than as part of the verbal lexicon—cf. the weak vs strong perfective tenses of Kayardild and Anindilyakwa. The Australian data on partitive culminations being so scarce, it is difficult to be adamant on that matter, and it is probably wiser to leave this as open question, both empirically and theoretically.

6.5.3 (Possible) wider consequences for a cross-linguistic and a socio-cultural theory of time

Before closing this investigation, let me add a few considerations about some possible wider implications of this survey for a theory of time, primarily from the perspective of language typology, and to a lesser extent from a socio-cultural standpoint—assuming that languages, as socio-cultural constructs, may reflect on certain long-term, social properties of said groups.

Let us turn first to an obvious cross-linguistic question. A striking cross-linguistic fact is that while avertive forms are widespread in the grammar of e.g. Australian languages—as shown in this study—but also Amazonian and Indigenous languages of the America, as well as e.g. languages of Papua-New Guinea, they seem to be mostly lexicalized (as verbs or as constructions) in many ‘Standard Average European’ languages, especially Romance and Germanic—see e.g. [Schwollenbach \(2019\)](#). Vice versa, constructions expressing actuality entailments (which are polar opposites of avertives, which I have dubbed above *inactuality entailments*) seem to be absent in Australian languages—at least on the basis of my language sample. Why this difference? The development paths we have uncovered in Australia suggest that a predominantly inflectional—either synthetic or periphrastic, including as combinations of

particles with certain inflectional modal markings—kind of grammatical system is used to convey avertivity. If one assumes that modal inflections are in fact event predicates of a special kind (i.e., they denote a modal state)—a view we have claimed (see [Section 6.4.2](#)) is substantiated by the diachrony of TAM/pronominal prefixes in non-Pama-Nyungan languages ([Osgarby 2018](#))—and if we bear in mind that several past irrealis are clearly derived from past imperfective tenses (cf. [Green \(1995\)](#): 195 ff.; [2003](#): 399) and note 90), then it would make sense to view Australian past irrealises as TAM forms combining a modal stative predicate (conveying e.g. a capacity, expectation, or desire state) with a past imperfective content. The only extended class of avertive structures where past perfective readings appear (though not even exclusively, as iterative contexts with licence imperfective morphology are attested, and past irrealis marking is also possible in several languages of the sample), are past indicative telic verbs combining with certain proximative adverbials, cf. [Section 6.4.2](#) (it should even be noted that our sample is in fact deprived of *bona fide* perfective tenses, and only offers aspectually underspecified tenses contextually capable of perfective readings—even when a grammatical description labels some tense ‘perfective’ or ‘punctual’ (cf. the Kayardild so-called perfective, which turned out to be aspectually underspecified).

In contrast, it appears that in at least some Romance languages, perfective marking is used to convey some avertive constructions—cf. the ‘want’ avertives in French, illustrated in (7), and comparable modal constructions in other Romance languages (e.g. Italian and Spanish, especially certain varieties, cf. [Sinner and Dowah 2020](#)), with a compound past marking bearing on a modal verb or construction, followed by an infinitive (cf. Argentinian Spanish *haber de* + INF). Like actuality entailments, Romance inactuality entailments (i.e. avertive meanings) appear to often involve a perfective viewpoint meaning, combined with a modal verb or construction, i.e. denoting a stative event predicate—which suggests that some kind of aspectual coercion is involved (this was independently suggested in e.g. [Homer \(2011\)](#)). Obviously, no such perfective viewpoint and aspectual coercion can be identified in Australian languages with inflectional irrealises, as they generally derive from imperfectives. This might explain why actuality entailment forms are so far undocumented in the grammar of Australian languages—interestingly, Romance inflectional conditionals most certainly do not give rise to actuality entailment readings for the very same reason: they are also derived from imperfective forms.

In a nutshell, avertives are essentially a category of ‘events/expectations/desires/beliefs gone wrong’; they are frequently connected with so-called apprehensionals or aversives, as are past irrealis morphemes in general, crosslinguistically (Vuillermet 2018; Sansò 2020)—this is obviously a direct reflex of their negative orientation. They essentially involve some frustrated intention or failed expectation—which may or may not associate with a negative feeling or evaluation, but regularly associates with mistaken beliefs or surprise, which tend to be negatively viewed. This suggests a strong connection of the category with affect, feelings, and therefore cognitive representations of social engagement with reality. Avertives are forms expressing the limited cognitive and causal abilities of human agents with respect to Time seen as a flow of events. Given their overabundance in the grammar and lexicon of Australian languages, they might be imbued with a particular signification in the way said cultures envision time—the prominent manner in which such attitudes to events are grammaticalized in certain languages might indicate that such concepts play an important role in the associated cultures. Indeed, it is tempting to establish a link between their prevalence in certain language areas, their rarity in others, and the way time and the individual were connected in the historical cultures having given rise to said languages.⁶⁵ However, investigating such issues would constitute a large comparative ethnolinguistic research project in its own right, and clearly falls without the purview of the present chapter.

But regardless of the cultural significance (or lack thereof) of such facts, it seems intuitively obvious that beliefs and desires in general permeate our perspective on time—volitional, predictive, and epistemic attitudes, of course, but

⁶⁵ Without necessarily supporting a classic Whorfian approach to the interaction between our perception of time and culture, one could hypothesize that avertive systems flourished among societies who shared significant cultural attitudes towards time. It might be plausible that among societies having preserved a ‘mythical’ conception of time where human beings have a more limited grasp of, and control over the flow of events, i.e., in societies where an individual’s intentions, perception, and beliefs about the flow of time are culturally perceived as precarious—and this might prove fertile ground for the frequent use of forms conveying meanings reflecting such culturally salient perspectives over the flow of time; but this does not explain why the relevant forms (e.g. avertives) came into existence in the first place, though—it would only account for a greater ease of grammaticalization of these forms.

also beliefs about there being an *agentively ordered*, i.e. human-mind like, organization of causes and effects (cf. the classical ‘argument from design’ in the organization of the universe, and the Leibnizian ‘watchmaker analogy’-based conception of time). Attributing an agentive direction to the organization of events in time is also a well-known cognitive bias in psychology, where the belief that things ‘happen for a reason’/need to make sense, permeates many ordinary thoughts. Avertivity is obviously related to such a cognitive mechanism, and reflects on its complementary facet: namely that things *don’t always happen* according to human agents’ thoughts, beliefs, or desires, because the way time and events unfold can be *non-directed* (i.e., may not be related to a goal or plan) at least from our limited, human perspective; it may even be (or seem) impacted by something like chaos in a radical way (where chaos can be regarded as an absence of agent-controlled causal ordering).

6.5.4 The final word

From a strictly linguistic point of view, I have here attempted to show (I hope without said attempt entailing a failure!) that important semantic and pragmatic regularities are involved in the various types of avertivity found across Australian languages, and that these regularities have meaningful consequences for our understanding of the cognitive architecture underlying the perception of time in such languages. In particular, I hope to have established that avertives in Australian languages involve complex event structures with a strong modal component, with a positive component of meaning (typically a belief/expectation or a desire, and/or a fragment of a positive event) and a negative part (a negative event, and underlyingly, the negation of the previously held belief/expectation/desire). Forms incorporating a semantically negative event element (negation, or a dedicated avertive affix/clitic/particle or adverbial) were shown to be semantically avertive. They contrast with synthetic inflectional irrealis-avertive forms for which the negative event information (including the failure for result states to obtain) is essentially pragmatically derived, and context-dependent—cf. e.g. (30), where context enforces a non-avertive reading of the volitional past irrealis. Several periphrastic avertives incorporating a synthetic avertive inflection appeared to constitute marked/emphatic semanticized counterparts of said pragmatically avertive inflections. Only semanticized avertives denote complex, modalized event structures of the type evoked above.

But what of a philosopher's concerns for time? The above facts and their analysis have certainly shed novel light at least on semantic/pragmatic (i.e. linguistic and cognitive) dispositions specific to Australian languages for construing time—and beyond that, for languages in general, as I have attempted to highlight some crosslinguistic common points, but also divergences w.r.t. avertivity.⁶⁶ Understanding the structuring properties of the human mind in its universality (as an abstract, cognitive organization), as well as its specificity (as e.g. is manifest in cultural systems, and possibly linguistic systems) is, I think, key to such an endeavour. A theory of how the 'human mind' relates to time, can only benefit from being linguistically-informed, and as such, will necessarily hover between language-specific properties, and abstract, universal properties of language as a general human ability—and if not universal properties, at least cross-linguistically frequent properties. Indeed, even language-specific categories resort to more basic semantic primitives or contents, such as e.g. imperfectivity, perfectivity, iteration, and so forth—and despite important variations, these notions remain both *comparable* and *common* across languages.

It seems obvious that a certain sliver of objective time *qua* actual history is not immune to a myriad *private states* entering the minds of human agents; avertivity constitutes a rather complex means of communicating such private states concerning the flow of events. If we put aside the question of time as a purely abstract structure (or a dimension of the universe), then surely, a theory of time must pay attention to the way the human mind gives it substance—as history, as myth, i.e. as *narratives*. And the nature and organization of languages, standing at the crossroads between cognition and culture, very much determine the way we construe this other, decidedly *human* time.

Last but not least, this chapter has also been an attempt at providing a practical illustration of what I take to be an obvious desideratum for linguists and philosophers alike, namely that looking at rich, complex data originating in seemingly exotic languages, can be essential when trying to decipher theoretical questions of a certain importance and complexity. This, I believe, is all the truer with looking at such central and thorny questions at the identification of the

⁶⁶ I believe that even if we leave aside the issue of the negative events and their relation to positive events, evidence for such ontologically complex events are of obvious interest for any philosopher with at least a passing interest the semantics of tense and aspect, and its role in determining how the human mind conceives of time.

properties of time with respect to the human mind—insofar as linguistic systems can shed light on the latter, of course.

Table 6.1 The language sample studied

	Language family	Language
Non-Pama-Nyungan	<i>Iwaidjan</i>	Iwaidja
		Mawng
	<i>Gunwinyguan</i>	Anindilyakwa
		Kunbarlang
		Bininj Gun-wok
	<i>Daly River</i>	Murrinh-Patha
	<i>Mirndi</i>	Jaminjung
		Wambaya
	<i>Maningrida</i>	Gurr-goni
	<i>Nyulnyulan</i>	Nyikina
	<i>Bunuban</i>	Goonyiandi
Pama-Nyungan	<i>Tangkic</i>	Kayardild
	<i>Ngumpin-Yapa</i>	Warlpiri
	<i>Ngarla</i>	Pilbara
	<i>Western Desert</i>	Yankunytjatjara
	<i>Arandic</i>	Arernte
	<i>Karnic</i>	Arapana

Table 6.2 Avertive patterns in our language sample

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
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Language family	Language	Synthetic MOD.PST avertive inflection	IRR.PST vs IRR.PR	Negative past events = NEG + IRR.PST	Past proximative/volitional	Avertive PART/Clitic/Affix+ V-IRR	Avertive PART/Clitic/Affix+ V-IND	REDuplication and iterative/proximative (imperfective strategies)	V-AVERT + NEG construction	Pragmatic PC V-PST
<i>Iwaidjan</i>	Iwaidja	V-IRR.PST	✓	<i>karlu, arlarrarr</i>	✓ ✓	<i>wurrkany</i> +V-IRR.PST/FUT, <i>maju</i> +V-IRR.PST	<i>wurrkany</i> +V-ANT <i>maju</i> +V-ANT <i>wanji</i> 'nearly'+V-ANT	RED-V-ANT	<i>karlu/arlarrarr</i> ⁶⁷	V-ANT
	Mawng	NF-V-IRR2	✓ ⁶⁸	<i>marrik</i>	✓		<i>wurkaj</i> 'nearly'+V-PST	—	<i>arlarrarr</i> —	V-PP
<i>Gunwinyguan</i>	Anindilyakwa	IRR-V-PST/Ø	✓	<i>nara</i>	✓	= <i>yedha</i> , <i>akwadhanga</i> 'near(ly)'	—	—	<i>nara/yanda</i>	REAL-V-Ø
	Kunbarlang	V-IRR.PST	✓ ⁶⁹ ×	<i>ngunda</i> (*) —	× ✓	<i>yimarne(k)</i> + V-IRR.PST —	—	—	<i>karlu</i> <i>karlu</i>	—
	Bininj Gun-wok	V-IRR ⁷⁰ CTRFAC V- PST/IRR	×	<i>djama; minj; marrek</i> —	✓	<i>kuyin</i> -V; <i>ba(r)lanh</i> -V ⁷¹ ; <i>yimarnek</i> 'like'; <i>djanggogo</i> 'for nothing'; <i>djaying</i> 'mistakenly'	<i>djaying</i> , (<i>yimarnek</i>) <i>kuyin</i> -/ <i>ba(r)lanh</i> -V-PFV/IMPF	<i>kuyin</i> -/ <i>ba(r)lanh</i> -V-IMPF V-RED-IRR/PST ⁷²	<i>burrkyak/larrh/gayakki/kurru</i> ⁷³	—

⁶⁷ *Karlu* in Iwaidja can be both a sentential negation, and a negative interjection ('no'). Cpr. Bininj Gun-wok *djama* (sentential negation) vs *burrkyak* ('no, nothing') cf. [Evans \(2003\)](#): 603–604).

⁶⁸ The Mawng irrealis 2 (I2) inflection can have both present and past priority modal ([Portner 2018](#)) readings; it is otherwise a past irrealis.

⁶⁹ Note that some younger speakers seem to accept forms combining IRR.PST prefixes with IRR.PR suffixes, cf. [Kapitonov \(2019\)](#): 178).

⁷⁰ The Bininj Gun-wok irrealis morphology is temporally ambiguous.

⁷¹ Cf. [Evans \(2003\)](#): 525, 611).

⁷² The so-called 'inceptive' reduplication can have avertive readings ('tried but failed') with irrealis or past tense-marked verbs in Bininj Gun-wok, cf. ([Evans 2003](#)): 374, 381).

⁷³ Cf. [Evans \(2003\)](#): 306).

<i>Daly River</i>	Murrinh-Patha	IRR.PST-V-IRR.IMPf	✓	<i>mere; manangka</i>	✓	—	<i>ngurdamay</i> 'try' ⁷⁴	—	<i>ma wurda</i> ⁷⁵	—
<i>Mirndi</i>	Jaminjung	IRR:V-IMPf	✓	<i>gurrany</i>	✓	<i>klosap</i> 'almost'	<i>birri/ngarla</i> 'try'	—	<i>damarlunŋ</i> ⁷⁶	—
	Wambaya	Aux-NACT.PST	✓	<i>guyala</i> ⁷⁷	✓	—	—	—	—	— ⁷⁸
<i>Maningrida</i>	Gurr-goni	V-IRR1 ⁷⁹	✓ ⁸⁰	<i>galu</i>	✓	<i>mundjarra</i> 'unrealized intention'	—	—	<i>galu</i> 'no, nothing' ⁸¹	— ⁸²
<i>Nyulnyulan</i>	Nyikina	IRR-V-PST	✓	<i>malu</i>	✓	<i>bulu, miliarry</i> 'almost' ⁸³	—	RED-PST ⁸⁴	<i>malu</i>	—

⁷⁴ Cf. [Ford and McCormack \(2007\)](#): 7).

⁷⁵ Cf. [Ford and McCormack \(2007\)](#): 17); Nordlinger and [Caudal \(2012\)](#): 106).

⁷⁶ Cf. [Schultze-Berndt \(2000\)](#): 93).

⁷⁷ IRR marking is compulsory with NEG *guyala*, but not with, but not with NEG *yangula*.

⁷⁸ [Nordlinger \(1998\)](#): 295) mentions a possibly avertive particle (*yurubu* 'for nothing'), but does not provide examples illustrating such uses.

⁷⁹ *Wurru/wurpu* 'just, only, except, but' often introduce a clause 'cancelling' a previous IRR1 clause describing an impending event ([Green \(1995\)](#): 295–296)); this is an adversative construction.

⁸⁰ IRR1 corresponds to a 'precontemporary' irrealis in the Gurr-goni scalar temporal system, close to past irrealis. Gurr-goni also has an IRR2 paradigm, which appears to function as a 'contemporary' (= recent past, 'extended present'/present irrealis) paradigm—*pace* [Green \(1995\)](#) who claims the contemporary/precontemporary distinction is neutralized for the irrealis.

⁸¹ Although IRR1 + *galu* cannot be found in Green's grammar, reduced negative clauses with *galu* can ([Green \(1995\)](#): 111)). I'm therefore extrapolating those should be possible.

⁸² Past realis clauses in Rembarrnga can be followed by the *wapa* 'in vain' avertive particle, see [McKay \(1975\)](#): 258).

⁸³ Cf. [Stokes \(1982\)](#): 281, 373).

⁸⁴ Cf. [Stokes \(1982\)](#): 43).

<i>Bunuban</i>	Goonyiandi	V-IRR:PST ⁸⁵	✓	×	✓	<i>wambawoo</i> 'nearly'	—	—	<i>marlami, mangaddi</i> , ⁸⁶ <i>marlami</i>	—
<i>Tangkic</i>	Kayardild	(V-AVERT) ⁸⁷ CTRFAC ₁ V- POT ⁸⁸ CTRFAC ₂ V- NF NEG.POT	×	×		— (or: <i>nginja, maraka</i> , 'counterfactual, not what it seems')	—	RED-NF ⁸⁹	<i>warirra</i> ⁹⁰	PST
<i>Ngumpin- Yapa</i>	Warlpiri	FUT V-IRR ⁹¹	✓	×	✓	<i>nganta</i> ∅ V- IRR ^{92,93}	—	—	<i>kala lawa</i> 'but no'	—

⁸⁵ IRR:PST corresponds to IRR:POT (-*yi/ -wi ~ -rni*) in [McGregor \(1990\)](#): 220).

⁸⁶ [McGregor \(1990\)](#): 348, 583).

⁸⁷ The Kayardild *-nangarra* ('almost') inflection suffix does not seem to have other modal meanings ([Evans 1995](#): 261); it is a unique type in the sample.

⁸⁸ Kayardild seems to offer one synthetic polyfunctional irrealis ((NEG.)POT) and two polyfunctional periphrastic irrealis-avertives: *maraka* ('counterfactual₁') + (NEG.)POT, *nginja* ('counterfactual₂') + (NEG.)POT, but for want of space, I will not be able to discuss the Kayardild modal system at great length here.

⁸⁹ Cf. [Evans \(1995\)](#): 290, ex. 7–78).

⁹⁰ [Evans \(1995\)](#): 341) even seems to offer an example where the *warirra* negator ('nothing, empty') appears before the verb—but this could be an informationally complex utterance.

⁹¹ [Legate \(2003\)](#): 157) gives an example with the *ngarra* FUTure auxiliary, whereas [Laughren \(2002\)](#) rather mentions the null auxiliary.

⁹² Both [Simpson \(2012\)](#): 36) and [Legate \(2009\)](#) mention a *nganta* ∅V.IRR construction, with *nganta* being a hypothetical/evidential particle.

⁹³ One should also mention the related 'mistaken thought' construction *kula-nganta* ('NEG-HYP') *Fut V-IRR*, cf. *Kula-nganta-kapirna wawirri panti-ka-rla, kala lawa* (NEG-seem-FUT-I kangaroo spear-IRR but no) 'I thought I was going to spear the kangaroo, but I didn't.' ([Nash 1980](#): 239). It shows that Warlpiri also has a *FUT V-IRR* proximal with avertive effects.

	Billinara	V-IMP ⁹⁴ V-IRR.PST ⁹⁵	✓ ×	× ×	✓ ?	<i>nganda= (?)</i> , <i>najing</i>	—	RED- ⁹⁶ <i>najing</i> ⁹⁷ <i>najing</i> ⁹⁸	— —
Pilbara	Ngarla	V-IRR.PST	✓	<i>mirta/ngurra(pirli)</i>	—	—	<i>walyi</i> , <i>pilyparr</i> , <i>purtukarri</i> ⁹⁹	RED	—
Western Desert	Yankunytjatjara	(V- INTENT _N) ¹⁰⁰	×	×	✓	<i>putu</i> V-INTENT- INCH-PST.IMPF	<i>putu</i> V- INTENT-INCH- PST.IMPF	—	—
Arandic	Arrernte	Aux-PURP V.PST	✓	<i>tyekenhe</i> ¹⁰¹	✓	—	<i>-elpe-</i> ‘nearly’ V’, <i>uyarne</i> V-	RED- <i>elpe</i> -V ¹⁰²	—

⁹⁴ Although (Meakins and Nordlinger 2014)’s label for this inflection is *IMPerative*, its semantics is clearly broader than that of a ‘priority’ modal (see Portner 2018).

⁹⁵ The present irrealis in Bilinarra combines the IMP (i.e. IRR) suffix with HORTative *-rla*. The past irrealis-avertive is realized by adding the DUBitative clitic = *nga* to the irrealis.

⁹⁶ Cf. Meakins and Nordlinger (2014): 162, ex. 417).

⁹⁷ Sentential negation does not seem to appear in the pattern; instead, we find *najing* (‘nothing’), a loanword from English (via Gurinji (Kriol), possibly).

⁹⁸ In this pattern too, the Bilinarra negator *lawara* ‘nothing’, cognate with Warlpiri *lawa* ‘no’, is not found in Meakins and Nordlinger (2014).

⁹⁹ *Purtukarri* is obviously cognate with the Western Desert avertive capacitative (‘couldn’t’) particle *putu*, and *walyi* with the Karnic proximative (‘nearly’) *walyi*.

¹⁰⁰ Yankunytjatjara *-kitja* INTENT is a nominalizing derivational volitional suffix, with avertive implicatures; it has no fixed temporal content. Pintupi-Luritja has a similar form (Goddard 1985:163, Rose 2001:70–71). It also appears in the semanticized avertive construction *putu* (‘in vain’) + V with a verbalizing suffix (*V-kitja-INCH-PST.IMPF*)—the latter construction is therefore verbal.

¹⁰¹ The Arrernte verb negator *tyekenhe* is obviously cognate with the PURP (*-tyeke*) inflection, so it could actually be a negative modal (irrealis) form too.

¹⁰² The meaning of that special reduplicated verb pattern seems to be proximative (Wilkins 1989: 261–262), but can have strong (and possibly mildly conventionalized) avertive implicatures.

							PST, <i>ingkwe</i> V-PST		
Karnic	Arapana	—	×	×	×	—	<i>panta</i> V- PST+PR, V- PST <i>panta-li</i> , <i>walyili-walyili</i> 'nearly' ¹⁰³	<i>panta-li</i>	—

¹⁰³ Derived from *walya* 'soon, directly' (Hercus 1994: 216); negative adverbial *panta-li* is similarly derived from *panta* 'not, in vain'.