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PAPERS
ON
DISCOURSE

JOSEPH E. GRIMES, EDITOR

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Mumuye Discourse Structure

Peter Krüsi

Abstract

Mumuye narratives divide naturally into three parts: introduction, corpus, and coda. Discourse structure is also described in terms of kinds of information; that is, events, setting, identification, dialogue, and comments.

This paper presents the characteristic structure of Mumuye discourse, mainly found in folk narratives.¹ Most examples are taken from a text given at the end of the paper in which the sentences are numbered. A literal translation of each sentence is given in parentheses followed by a free translation in quotation marks.

GENERAL STRUCTURE

Mumuye narratives divide naturally into three parts: introduction, corpus, and coda.

Every narrative starts with an **introduction** which gives the topic of the story, or the main characters of the story. Folk tales and made-up stories are introduced with *ru gmaa'gmaa' tan*² (story free now) 'The free story I am telling now. . .', followed by the identification of the characters: *yi pu'n yi ti'nbmoo'li* (hold Fly hold Wormcast) '. . . is about Fly and Wormcast.' Fly is the main character because he is mentioned first. The form of introduction in such tales can vary considerably; sometimes only the main character is mentioned there.

In the introduction more specific details can be given about the characters. For example, a story about a certain chief begins *ru gmaa'gmaa' tan yi kpanti. Kpanti bo za'n tu yi. Za'n shín ke la kujera. To wá'n ke la kujera be. Too. Kpanti lán zee.* (Story free now about Chief. Chief which people caught. People put on wood chair.

¹Mumuye is spoken by approximately 250,000 people who represent the main population of Muri Division of Adamawa Province in the North-East State of Nigeria. The language is classified under Adamawa language family (Greenberg 1963).

I began research on Mumuye in the town of Lankaviri in 1968 under the auspices of the Institute of Linguistics, in accordance with an agreement signed by that organisation and the Ahmadu Bello University of Zaria, Nigeria. A phonological analysis has been made and some grammatical research done. A concordance of Mumuye has been produced by a computer, sponsored by the National Science Foundation through grant GS-1605 at the University of Oklahoma Research Institute.

This paper was written at a workshop held in Nigeria in 1972 and directed by Joseph E. Grimes.

²Mumuye phonemes are: stops p, t, k, b, d, g; kp, gb, bm, km, gm; implosive ɓ; fricatives f, s, sh (voiceless alveopalatal), v, z, j (voiced alveopalatal), h; nasals m, n; liquids w, l, y, yn;

Want stay on wood chair consequential. Well. Chief grow guinea-corn.) 'The free story I am telling now is about a chief. The chief was caught by the people and was put on a wooden chair. They wanted to keep him on a wooden chair. Well, this chief was growing guinea corn.' Here the end of the introduction is marked by the particle *too* 'well', before the actual story begins.

Information about the environment can also be given in the introduction, provided that this information stays true throughout the story. In this way sentence 2 in our text gives the setting for the whole story.

Narratives other than folk tales require an introduction which differs from untrue or traditional stories. When a person wants to tell somebody some news, he introduces his speech with *n tó n ko mo ru* (I want I tell you news) 'I want to tell you something.'

In historical narratives, a short remark about the topic may serve as introduction: *Daa buru be. Too. Daa buru wa'n ne.* (Fathers our consequential. Well. Fathers our live continuative.) 'Concerning our fathers. Well, our fathers lived.' Here again, *too* leads into the actual account.

The **corpus** is the nucleus of the Mumuye narrative. It is made up of paragraphs. Besides the succession of events, we find information about setting, background, and collateral information. Frequently the narrator interjects his own comments into the story.

Every narrative ends with a *coda*, i.e., some sort of comments or indication that it is finished. In historical narratives or in news accounts about village life, the narrator may end his speech with *ru waayna to* (news finish completive) 'The story is finished,' or *ru ta kpan* (story continue not) 'The story has ended.' In folk tales, a sort of moral may be added to serve as a *coda*. Sentences (39) to (41) in the text represent the *coda*. They explain why people kill Baye.

PARAGRAPH

The paragraph consists of a series of events with other information which cohere together in space and time. The boundaries between paragraphs are signalled by the particle *too*, by setting in stage and time, and by change of the subject participant. Sometimes all three of these mark a new paragraph; sometimes only one or two are present.

The particle *too* is borrowed from Hausa. In Mumuye, it is used as a natural *paragraph marker* which the narrator uses to divide the story into smaller parts. In our text, *too* coincides with setting and change of participant in sentences (9) and (15). In sentence (3), it appears only with change of participant; the setting is still the one given for the whole story in the introduction. In sentence (29), *too* marks a natural break between the complication and the resolution of the story.

Sometimes *too* is used arbitrarily as a hesitation form. In a story about Cat and Chicken, it occurs in the middle of a sentence between two clauses. *bo non tó ka hn,*

too, kn dáa to (when place darken here, well, Chicken go completive) 'When it became dark, then Chicken went away.' This use does not imply paragraph division.

A new paragraph frequently starts with some comments on space, circumstances, or time in which the events take place (i.e., the setting).

A setting in space, as already mentioned, appears usually as part of the introduction, where it serves for the whole story. Up to now I am not aware of space resetting units within noninitial paragraphs.

Circumstances may change in the course of a narrative, although the general setting of space remains the same. Descriptions of circumstance occur with the continuative particle *ne ~ re*,³ which is suffixed to verbs at or near the beginning of paragraphs. Sentence (10) in our text is such a resetting unit: *bayeh na wa'n ne* (Baye past sit continuative) 'Baye was sitting.'⁴ The following events take place while Baye is sitting there.

Time setting units occur frequently at the beginning of paragraphs. They can vary from one word to a few sentences. In the story about Cat and Chicken, the time setting link in one paragraph consists of the word *buru* (tomorrow): *buru yaka héé' kn do wu ko* (tomorrow Cat ask about it focus) 'The next day Cat asked Chicken about it.'

Sentences (16) and (17) in our text represent a time setting unit consisting of two sentences.

Subject Identification. In Mumuye narratives the subject participant is normally reidentified whenever there is a change of participants. If there is no change for a series of events, then there is no reidentification. For example, in the story about Cat and Chicken, we find *yaka túu sonla, a kn, tó kn bisi wu jon* (Cat take fibres, give Chicken, say Chicken turn him please) 'Cat took the fibres and gave them to Chicken. He asked if Chicken would please turn them into a rope for him.' The next event requires a new subject: *kn á kati, a ta re* (Chicken come recent-completive, then receive continuative) 'After Chicken had come she received them.'

Reidentification of a character as subject marks a new paragraph, even if there is no change of participant. Sentence (36) in our text represents such a signal for a new

flaps r, vb; vowels i, eh (mid front close), e (mid front open), a, u, oh (mid back close), o (mid back open). Nasalized vowels are written i', e', a', u', o'. All of the vowels may be lengthened. There is also a syllabic alveolar nasal.

Mumuye has a three-level tone system with three register tones and a few glides. More study on tone has to be done. Grammatical tone is found on verbs and dominates the tense system. On pronouns, high tone marks imperative.

The most common syllable patterns are CV and CVN. In CVN syllables the distribution of vowels is restricted to V and V'. CVN and CV'N are contrastive, for example *sàn* 'star' and *sà'n* 'ant'.

³*ne* and *re* are allomorphs: CVN - *ne*; CV - *re*.

⁴*bayeh* and *ke're* are two kinds of giant lizards. Since I am uncertain of their correct scientific names, I will call them Baye and Kere.

paragraph. In sentence (30) Rabbit gives some advice. In sentence (36) he is reidentified. There are no events in between. Sentences (31) to (35) is a comment by the narrator on what Rabbit said in sentence (30).

In the story about Chicken and Cat, we find that reidentification without change of character, together with time setting, mark a new paragraph: *tó ne aa. B'uru yaka hée' kn do wu ke* (say link *aa*. Tomorrow Cat ask Chicken about it focus) 'Cat said, "Aha!" The next day Cat asked Chicken about it.'

In dialogue, the pattern of participant identification makes an exception to the principle that reidentification gives a new paragraph. In sentence (6) in our text, Baye is identified without marking a new paragraph. This makes clear who is speaking without implying a change of setting or circumstance. It cannot mark a new paragraph because the following sentence is not referring to the participant in sentence (6), but to Kere in sentence (4). The same thing is found in sentence (20).

Information other than events can be summarized as stage and time settings, dialogues, and comments. Background information can be given either in comments or in dialogues.

The corpus of the story about the giant lizards is divided into five paragraphs:

The first paragraph after the introduction consists of sentences (4) to (9). It is of the dialogue type. Here plans are made for further actions.

The second paragraph consists of three blocks. Sentence (10) represents the stage setting block, followed by an event block in sentences (11) to (12). Sentences (13) to (15) is a comment block, marked by a second person singular pronoun with which the speaker addresses the hearer directly.

The third paragraph consists of a time setting block in Sentences (16) and (17), followed by a dialogue block in sentences (18) to (29). Background information is found in sentences (21) to (23), indicated by the particles *bo* 'that' and *ne* 'and' (not the continuative *ne*): *ne tó ne bo . . . ne tó ne . . . ne tó ne . . .* (and say link that . . . and say link . . . and say link . . .) 'He said that the feast is in progress at the dancing place, and that he is wasting his time, and that he is fixing his friend's hair.'

The fourth paragraph consists of a dialogue block, followed by a comment block in sentences (30) to (35). In this case, the dialogue consists of only one sentence, which gives the resolution of the story. In the comment block, sentences (31) to (35), the narrator gives his own detailed explanations concerning the resolution. The comment is marked by the particle *ko* 'focus': *bi baye ko* (body Baye focus) 'concerning the body of Baye . . .'

The fifth paragraph is of the dialogue type. The paragraph boundary is determined by the reidentification of Rabbit.

CONSEQUENTIAL *be*

The consequential particle *be* is of stylistic importance. Theoretically it could be omitted throughout a text. Texts without the use of *be*, however, sound abrupt and

rude to the Mumuye ear. *be* is used in two different ways: the logical consequence and the particular consequence.

In the text about the giant lizards, we find two examples of logical consequence. In sentence (21), Rabbit tells Kere that the wrestling feast is in full swing and that consequently Kere should not waste time in fixing his friend's hair. In sentence (41), we are told that consequently to what had happened in the story, people beat the drum which is covered with Baye's skin even today.

Particular consequence is often found in repetitions, for example in sentence (17) of our text. Here *be* is a sort of link between sentence (17) and sentence (18). In sentence (16), the time is reset by saying that the sun had come to a certain place, 4 p.m. for example. Sentences (17) and (18) could then read: 'When it was 4 o'clock, Rabbit was calling.'

In sentence (31), it is said that Baye remained ugly. Sentence (32) says that Kere stays well as a consequence of sentence (33): Baye painted him much.

Frequently *be* is found between two clauses in a conditional sentence, as in sentence (37) in our text. In this environment, *be* could be translated with the English 'but': 'But if you say you want to go on painting, then with what will people beat the drum?'

MUMUYE TEXT

The giant lizards

(1) *ru gmaa'gmaa' tan yf ke're yf bayeh* (story free now hold Kere hold Baye) 'The free story I am telling now is about Kere and Baye.' (2) *kohma'n jeh vu balan da'n ne pon pon pon* (wrestling-feast blow thing place dancing link honk honk honk) 'The horns of the wrestling feast are blowing in the dancing place, honk honk honk.' (3) *too* 'Well,' (4) *a ke're báayna* (link Kere call) 'Kere was calling,' (5) *tó ne bayeh* (say link Baye) 'saying, "Baye!"' (6) *bayeh tó hn* (Baye say what) 'Baye said, "What?"' (7) *ne wu a re* (link he come continuative) 'He said that he should come,' (8) *ne tó ri ò zo yu* (link say they fix each-other head) 'and he wants them to fix each other's heads'. (9) *too* 'Well,' (10) *bayeh na wa'n ne* (Baye past sit continuative) 'Baye was sitting' (11) *a bèeh ke're bi* (link paint Kere body) 'and painted the body of Kere.'⁵ (12) *bèeh ke're bi, bèeh ke're bi* (paint Kere body, paint Kere body) 'He painted and painted the body of Kere.' (13) *mó zì ke're be, bi bíbe be* (you! see Kere consequential, body his consequential) 'Look at Kere! at his body.' (14) *mo lòoh jì'n gn kpan* (you take-off eye locative not) 'You cannot take your eyes off, it is so nice.' (15) *too* 'Well.' (16) *n, la wu a ta* (o.k. sun it come imperative) 'O.k., the sun came.' (17) *la wu tó wu á nihñ be* (sun it say link it come here consequential) 'The sun said that it came here.'⁶ (18) *a daashoh báayna* (link Rabbit call) 'Then Rabbit called,' (19) *tó ne bëehsan* (say link friend) 'saying, "My friend!"' (20) *bëehsan ne hn* (friend link what)

⁵The Mumuye dress each other's hair into nice and complicated patterns. Since Baye and Kere have no hair by nature, painting of their bodies is used as an equivalent for hair dressing.

⁶The Mumuye tell the time by pointing to the sun and saying that the sun had come here.

'His friend said, "What?"' (21) *ne tó ne bo kohma'n jéeh vu balan da'n be* (link say link that wrestling-feast blow thing place dancing consequential) 'He said that the horns of the wrestling feast are blowing in the dancing place,' (22) *ne tó ne wu wàlè gaa' wu wà'n kaa gn* (link say he find house he stay in it) 'and he said that he was wasting his time (idiom).' (23) *ne tó ne wu ti beehsan do yu* (link say he fix friend still hair) 'And he said that he was still fixing his friend's hair.' (24) *tó o ho ho jeh* (say o ho ho, man!) 'He said, "O ho ho, man!"' (25) *mo tí beeh jeh* (you fix painting, man!) ' "You are painting, man!" ' (26) *mó to to non ko kpan* (you! fix complete place focus not) ' "Don't fix it like this!" ' (27) *basi tí mo kpa ya* (before fix you not question) ' "Before, did he fix yours?" ' (28) *tó tí wu to* (say fix him complete) 'He said that he fixed it.' (29) *too* 'Well.' (30) *lùku ba-ka bando'n* (sprinkle like Bandon) ' "Just sprinkle him like Bandon's body." ' (31) *bi bayeh ko weh wà'n ne bi kokoro* body Baye focus demonstrative stay continuative body ugly) 'As far as Baye's body is concerned, it stayed ugly.' (32) *bi ke're ko, ke're wà'n ne be* (body Kere focus, Kere stay-well continuative consequential) 'Concerning Kere's body, Kere was well done.' (33) *bayeh bèeh wu dooli* (Baye paint him much) 'Baye painted him with much care.' (34) *bu-vu-bo ke're shì non-ni be* (because-of-this Kere be-nice very consequential) 'Because of this Kere was very nice.' (35) *bayeh bèeh wu dooli* (Baye paint him much) 'Baye painted him with much care.' (36) *basho tó n* (Rabbit say o.k.) 'Rabbit said, "O.k."' (37) *bo mo kòyi mo tó mo béeh tokn be, a za'n dà wáa da'n bi ne wu-ya* (if you tell you want you paint again consequential, link people go beat drum possessive with what) ' "But if you say you want to go on painting, then with what will people beat the drum?" ' (38) *za'n dà wáa da'n ne bayeh ko kpa ya* (people go beat drum with Baye focus not question) 'Do the people beat the drum with anything but Baye's skin?' (39) *ru bo za'n yó' bayeh kati* (story which people kill Baye resultative) 'That's why people kill Baye.' (40) *za'n pu ka'n kaa-non* (people cover drum with-it) 'People use it as drum skin.' (41) *za'n waa kati be* (people beat resultative consequential) 'People go drumming with it.'

⁷Bandon is another giant lizard. See footnote 4.

⁸The skin of Baye is used for special drums, called *da'n* and *ka'n*. If Kere had fixed Baye's skin with much care, like that of a crocodile, then it could not be used any more for making drums.