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DISCOURSE

JOSEPH E. GRIMES, EDITOR

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# Participant Focus in Khaling Narratives

Sueyoshi Toba

## Abstract

Participant focus, a kind of participant identification that identifies participants with regard to their importance in a discourse, distinguishes Khaling event oriented narratives from participant focused narratives. In event oriented narratives, a sequence of events is united in one plot, whereas in participant focused narratives the events are used to describe characters. In event oriented narratives, neither the events nor the participants stand out. When a speaker wishes to give some things more prominence, with greater interest, tension, or surprise value, then the participant focused form is used. In this kind of discourse, paragraph boundaries are signalled by grammatical spotlighting on the participant in focus. Participants' focal or nonfocal status is further signalled by the use of noun phrases and pronominalization.

Khaling is one of the languages of the East Himalayish section of Tibeto-Burman language family (Schaefer 1966). It is spoken by approximately 12,000 people in the Solu Khumbu and Khotang districts of Sagarmatha Zone in Eastern Nepal.<sup>1</sup>

This paper presents the participant focus system that operates in Khaling narrative discourse structure.<sup>2</sup> By focus we mean a kind of participant identification that identifies participants with regard to their importance in a discourse. To some degree, this builds on a paper by Schulze and Bieri (1973), who found that two major types of fables and stories are distinguished in Sunwar. One type is event oriented, that is, the story is told for the sake of events as such. The other type of fables and stories centers around participants. These distinctions are also made in Khaling, which is related to Sunwar.

We can recognize an event oriented narrative discourse by observing the manner in which events are linked with each other. A sequence of events is united in one plot. In contrast to this, in a participant focused discourse the events are used to describe the characters. Thus it is not important in a participant focused discourse to consider the mere sequence of events, but to relate the events to the participants.

Event oriented narratives in Khaling do not differentiate events from each other; they are really chronicles in which neither the events nor the participants stand out.

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<sup>1</sup>Khaling phonemes are stops p t k, ph th kh, b d j (palatal) g, bh dh jh gh, fricatives s h, liquids r l, nasals m n ng, semivowels w y, front unrounded vowels i e ä, front rounded vowels ü ö, central vowel aa, and back vowels u o a. Khaling has two contrastive phonemic tones, high and low. High tone is symbolized with ' in front of a word.

<sup>2</sup>This paper was written at a field workshop held in 1973 at Tribhuvan University under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Personal accounts, whether they are travelogues, diaries, or life stories, fall into the event oriented narrative pattern.

On the other hand, if one thing stands out with greater interest, tension, or surprise value, then one uses the participant focused form. Fables and stories with many actors fall into the category of participant focused narratives.

#### GENERAL ORGANIZATION

Khaling narratives of both kinds consist of three obligatory parts: an introduction, a body, and an ending. Each part can consist of one or more paragraphs.

The **introduction** to narrative discourse always begins by telling the hearer what the story teller wants to talk about. He might say *ung-aa 'sohpu-po 'braa maa-ngaa*. 'I will give a talk on the Yeti.'<sup>3</sup> Or he might say *reskap-su-po 'braa*. 'A story about two orphans.' In other words, he gives the title of the story. The grammatical form used for this is a statement in the nonpast tense (I. Toba 1973).

Then a spatial or a temporal setting, or both in that order, are given in a locative noun phrase such as *'tubaa bhaayaa-bi* (one place-in) 'in a certain place', or in a subordinate clause marked by a temporal enclitic as in *am-su 'yaahki muy-t-i-lo* (he-dual small be-past-3dual-when) 'when they were small'. This kind of clause stands in the introduction of an initial paragraph as well as in later paragraphs. If it is used in later paragraphs, the clause may be lexically more specific than it would be in the beginning.

Introduction of all the participants comes next, even if they have already been mentioned in the title: *'saahpu reskap-su dhaajubhaay muy-t-i* (two orphan-dual brothers be-past-dual) 'there were two orphan brothers'. Background information about the participants continues, giving details about them such as their age, or describing their habits, as in *'tubaa sew ghöle ci-bi chöpä mo-t-ä* (one blacksmith much liquor-in addicted be-past-3sg) 'There was a certain blacksmith who was very much addicted to liquor.' The distinctive grammatical form used here is the past tense.

A good story teller reserves the particle *e*, which marks reported speech, for the introductory part of his narrative *am lemaa mü-ne-bi kokpä mo-t-ä e* (he lie do-infinitive skilful be-past-3sg reported-speech) 'he was skilful in lying, they say'. When he stops using this particle at the paragraph end, the hearer knows the introduction part ends. Less skilled story tellers sprinkle *e* throughout the text.

A series of events occupies the **body** of a narrative. First, however, a setting for the events in space and time is given, using the past tense form. This is the same in form as the setting given at the beginning of a narrative, and it begins a paragraph. The following example shows this: *'tude bhaayaa-bi düm-i-t-i* (one place-in meet-dual-past-dual) 'In one place they two met.' Change of location and time marks a new paragraph as in *delkam-bi les-t-i-lo* (village-house-in drop-past-dual-when) 'when the

<sup>3</sup>The Yeti or Abominable Snowman is believed to inhabit the Himalayan region. Various ethnic groups there have different versions of the story.



two dropped in to the village-house'. The events that constitute the main event line (Bradley 1971) are all preceded by conjunctions such as *manaa* 'and', *mebe-naa* 'after that', or by adverbs such as *tām-kaa* 'from this time on'. Events not belonging to the main event line are not introduced by conjunctions and adverbs, but are made dependent by verbal suffixes expressing preceding (*-saa*) action, as in 'yu *kap-saa jaa-ngaa* (rice cook-preceding eat-1sg) 'after cooking I eat', or simultaneous (*-to*) action: *mā-yo-kaa 'khwaah-to menaa waayh-pi-to mü-t-ä* (there-below-from go-simultaneous and return-come-simultaneous do-past-3sg) 'Going down and returning at the same time is what he did.' These secondary events, as we may call events that do not constitute the main event line, are related to the main event by a locational adverb like *mā-yo* 'down there', which states that the event takes place or starts from the same place as the main event it refers to.

Collateral information (Grimes 1975) takes three forms: negation, as in *ung-aa ma-tap-ngaa mu-ngaa* (I-agent not-play-1sg be-1sg) 'I have not played yet.' Question: *maang i-mā-mim, soroli* (what you-do-adjectivizer, fox) 'What do you do, Fox?' Quotation: *än yo 'suh paathi sammo khlus i-je maanaa i-nü nokco äs-t-ä* (now also three measurement-of-grain until wild-berries you-eat and you-fine shaman say-past-3sg) '“You eat three measures of wild berries even now, and you will be fine,” said the shaman.’<sup>4</sup>

The ending of a Khaling narrative is characterized by a nonevent which includes the result of the events; its grammatical form is past tense: *am-su-po räjä chük-t-ä mām bhaayaa-bi* (he-dual-of kingdom become-past-3sg that place-in) 'In that place, the kingdom became theirs,' and an application which consists of a nonpast tense form as in *än-kaa damaay-po kwaam reh-t-um-kaa böri sapal-po 'braa rem-ne thik gö* (now-form tailor-of mouth trust-past-1sg-from always midge-of talk trust-infinitive right is) 'I would rather trust the midge's talk than tailor's talk.'

The discourse termination signal is a past tense *aapo 'braa ner-t-ä* (my talk finish-past-3sg) 'My talk is finished,' or simply *tephem* 'this much'.

#### EVENT ORIENTED NARRATIVES

In Khaling event oriented narratives, one event simply follows the other. Grammatically, events are put in order by a clause that contains the coordinating enclitic *-naa*. A sequence of several events which are all joined to each other with *-naa* forms a cohesive unit. The beginning of such a unit is marked by a dependent clause containing the temporal enclitic *-lo* 'when'. This gives the setting for the new sequence. The verb to which *-lo* is suffixed is not a repetition from the preceding clause: *khlus-po khaang-bi wōng-i-t-i-lo khlus jö-ne mā-su-ä haat mü-s-su* (wild-berry-of plant-in enter-dual-past-dual-when wild-berry eating that-dual-agent contest do-past-3dual) 'When the two of them entered into the wild berry bush, they had a wild berry eating contest.' Another way in which the beginning may be marked is with the logical enclitic *-kho* 'if': *molo än ic-ä tä khlus jö-yi-kho*. . . (but now 1pl-inclusive-agent that wild-berry eat-dual-if . . . ) 'But now if we two eat wild berries . . . ' After

<sup>4</sup>The verb prefix *i-* occurs in any clause involving hearer as an actor or undergoer, and in any clause involving speaker as undergoer. It is not used in the imperative.

this, the events follow one after the other as described. The end of a unit is not marked directly, but the beginning of the next sequence shows indirectly the end of the preceding sequence.

If the speaker chooses to interrupt sequences of events in order to give explanations, evaluations, or references to place as resetting, he does so by leaving the main line of events and connecting the parenthetical material with locative adverbs such as *mā-yo-kaa* 'from down there', *yaakaam-thaa* 'to over there', etc. For explanation: *mā-bi hephem go-t-ä bhaane* (that-in how be-past-3sg saying) 'I am telling you how it was there.' Evaluation: *mā-yo-kaa . . . maang lemaa i-mü-t-ä* (down-from . . . what lie you-do-3sg) 'From down there . . . what a lie did he say?' For reference to time it is as in *soroli-ä aajo-mim heng-saa-ngaa ung-aa räs sing-u* (fox-agent before-adjectivizer likewise-intensifier I-agent king ask-1sg) 'Fox, just as before, said, "I will ask the king."' '

Coordinating linkage is given by the enclitic *-naa* 'and then'. This enclitic is attached either to an infinitive or to an inflected verb form that repeats the content of the preceding sentence: *ung-aa bay 'sen-t-aa. bay 'sen-t-aa-naa . . .* (I-agent cow see-past-1sg. cow see-past-1sg-and-then . . . ) 'I watched the cow. And after I watched the cow . . . ' In this example the subject *ung-aa* in the first clause does not have to be repeated in the linkage because the pronominalized verb form identifies the subject adequately.

#### PARTICIPANT FOCUSED NARRATIVES

When a Khaling story teller gives the participant focused type of narrative he uses linking less frequently. The reason is that the sequence of events is not important in itself; but what the speaker wants to do is to describe the participants by what happens to them. In this kind of discourse, paragraph boundaries are signalled by spotlighting on the participant in focus (Schulze and Biere 1973:396). That is, at the beginning of the new paragraph the new participant who is to be in the center of attention is introduced. At the same time, we also have a reference to stage and setting. The end of a paragraph is symbolized by a phonological signal, namely falling intonation with pause: *soroli mo-t-ä . . . maanaa būrā ut samundraa-po phār-bi carey* (fox be-past-3sg . . . and an old camel sea-of near graze) 'There was a fox . . . PARAGRAPH And an old camel was grazing near the sea.'

Whenever the story teller introduces a new participant, he always uses a noun or an expanded noun phrase to identify him. The grammatical form used for introducing a new participant is always the past tense active or stative, as in *soroli läl 'khüs-t-ä* (fox first go-past-3sg) 'The fox went first.' For an expanded noun phrase: *cawri sey-pä 'tubaa sām mo-t-ä* (cattle see-result one Sherpa be-animate-past-3sg) 'a certain Sherpa herdsman lived'.

As the story progresses, the story teller always gives a second identification of the same participant by using a free pronoun in the following sentence. From then on, identification of that character is restricted to the pronominal verb affix as long as the teller refers to the same participant in the same role or grammatical position.

The technique described is exemplified in the following excerpt from a text. In the first sentence of the text, the main participants, two brothers, are introduced by a noun phrase in agreement with the pronominal verb suffix: *anaam saahpu reskap-su mü-yi-ti* (formerly **two orphan-dual be-animate-dual-past-dual**) 'Long ago there lived two orphans.' The next sentence identifies them again with a free pronoun: *am-su-po us-mām-pāhp mis-t-i*. (**3dual-of possessive-mother-father die-past-dual**) 'Their parents died.' In the next sentence, and from there on as long as they are performing the actions, only the pronominal verb suffix is used; one of the series of sentences that follow the last example is *del-kam-bi les-ti-lo . . .* (**village-house-in arrive-past-dual-when . . .**) 'when the two of them arrived at the village houses . . .'

When another participant takes over the action, he comes into focus as subject, while the first participant goes out of focus: *ghöle has-hām-ā reskap-su kwaal-te-nu* (**many people-plural-agent orphan-dual chase-past-plural**) 'Many people chased the two orphans.' The new participant is identified by a noun or an expanded noun phrase in agreement with the verb pronominal suffix.

If the first participant comes back into focus, he must be reidentified by a noun phrase again: *hira-po dana-ā mām reskap-su rö-te-su* (**pearl-of piece-instrument that orphan-dual fall-down-past-dual**) 'A piece of pearl fell on those two orphans.' *mām* reminds the hearer that this participant has been identified before.

As we have seen, participant identification makes use of agreement with the pronominal verb suffixes. Furthermore, when participant focus shifts to a participant who has already been introduced, the participant coming into focus is followed by *ne*, focus within correlative, 'on the other hand' or the Nepali loan word *cay*, which is the equivalent to *ne*: *soroli ku-ā khwaat-t-ä . . . maanaa ut ne ku-kaa pakaa-bi läst-ä* (**fox water-instrument carry-past . . . and camel on-the-other-hand water-from outside-in come-out-past-3sg**) 'The fox was carried away by the water . . . The camel, on the other hand, came out of the water to land.' In this way the hearer knows who is in focus from now on.

Khaling free pronouns play a significant part in participant identification. Pronouns distinguish person and number: first, second, and third person, and singular, dual, and plural number. The components of the system are the speaker (S), the hearer (H), one individual who is neither speaker nor hearer (O), and an unspecified number of individuals who do not include the speaker or hearer (X). Combinations of these give the effect of the three numbers, including inclusive and exclusive first person forms. There are two case markers that may be attached to the pronoun, *-ā* for the agent role (*-aa* in first person plural exclusive) and *-po* for possessive. The object role is marked by the absence of the agent marker.

Table 1 shows the Khaling free pronoun system in regard to speaker and hearer involvement.

Speaker involved				Speaker not involved		
Hearer involved	ici ik	'we two' 'we all'	S+H S+H+X	in eci en	'you' 'you two' 'you all'	H H+O H+X
Hearer not involved	ung ocu ok	'I' 'we two' 'we all'	S S+O S+X	am am-su am-hām	'he' 'they two' 'they all'	O O+O O+X

Table 1. Khaling free pronouns.

S=speaker, H=hearer,

O=one other not the speaker or hearer,

X=an indefinite number of persons who do not include the speaker or hearer.

Beside the free pronouns, there is a set of pronominal verb suffixes that in subject and object position agree with them or with noun phrases: *ik kam 'khwaah-ki* (we house go-1pl) 'we go home', *am-ä en käpci i-bi-ni* (he-agent you-plural money involving-you-give-2pl) 'he gives money to you all', *ung-aa am-hām ci bi-ngaa-nu* (I-agent 3pl beer give-1sg-3pl) 'I give them beer.' In this set the pronoun and suffix categories correspond. Some of these suffixes are subject to morphophonemic changes that are not of interest here (I. Toba 1973). Table 2 shows the pronominal verb suffix system.

Speaker involved			Speaker not involved	
Hearer involved	-si -ki	S+H S+H+X	-ü -si -ni	H H+O H+X
Hearer not involved	-u -su -kaa	S S+O S+X	-ü -su -nu	O O+O O+X

Table 2. Khaling pronominal verb suffixes.