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ON  
DISCOURSE

JOSEPH E. GRIMES, EDITOR

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# Overlay in Loron Discourse

Inge Leenhouts

## Abstract

Message discourses exhibit a systematic use of overlay patterns. These discourses are made up of planes, the first of which introduces only new information. Following planes each give some new and some repeated information. There is a strict time orientation within each plane, even though the impact of the whole is topical rather than temporal.

This paper presents a description of discourse as found mainly in one class of nonnarrative texts in Loron.<sup>1</sup> The sample text given here is a message spoken on tape from a Loron chief in the northeast corner of the Ivory Coast to his nephew in Abidjan, the capital in the south. Other messages and nonnarrative texts have been compared with it, as well as a French letter written by one of the few Lorons literate in that language.<sup>2</sup>

In analyzing Loron discourse, I find a structure that corresponds with what is called **overlay** by Grimes (1972, 1975). He gives examples from Borôro of Brazil and Pidgin of Papua New Guinea in which the speaker seems to go 'round and round' in telling his story. The story is made up of **planes**, the first of which introduces only

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<sup>1</sup>Loron (Lorhon, Loghon, Tuni, Tësi, Lomake) is spoken by between 2000 and 5000 people who live in the northeast of Ivory Coast in the subprefecture of Téhini, and by a few others across the border with Upper Volta (Galgouli). Bendor-Samuel (1971) classifies the language as a dialect of Kulango (Gur), and gives Loghon and Tegesy as related dialects within Kulango.

The people call themselves *Tësi* (pl. *Tëbu*). They live in hamlets, sometimes no bigger than three or four houses. Between Téhini and Govitan there is practically no population mixture with Lobi or Kulango. Going eastward, however, most villages have a mixed population with Loron, Lobi, Kulango, and others. The Loron of the west part understand the Kulango of Bouna, but not the Kulango spoken near Bondoukou. The culture is almost identical with that of the Lobi.

With my co-worker Ingrid Person, I began research on Loron in October of 1973, including a three week stay in the village of Semindana. We worked under the auspices of the Société Internationale de Linguistique, in accordance with an agreement signed with the Institut de Linguistique Appliquée of the University of Abidjan. This paper was written at a workshop held in Abidjan in 1973.

<sup>2</sup>Sending messages by a third person is an established Loron custom. The carrier of the message, after the usual greetings, gives the message in exactly the same order as it was given to him. The second person singular pronoun is used to address the person to whom the message is directed. In the letter of the chief to his nephew the latter is addressed as 'he', probably because the chief was speaking a taped message for the first time, and so is speaking to us and to the tape recorder rather than to his nephew. In working with the son of the chief as a monolingual informant, I recorded other messages. These were all in the more traditional style of direct discourse; the person addressed is 'you'.

new information. Following planes each give some new and some repeated information. The repeated information, however, is given in a special way, not necessarily as a literal repetition, but in a way that gives further detail on what was said in an earlier plane. In this way the rate of information introduction is kept low.

#### CLASSES OF TEXT

Loron texts examined so far fall into three types, only one of which involves the systematic use of overlay.

- a) Messages from one person to another. An example of this class is used here to show the overlay pattern.
- b) Stories relating things that happened to a person show no clear overlay pattern.
- c) Animal stories or tales about the life and experience of animals. No overlay found yet.

#### DIVISION OF THE MESSAGE

There is no clear introduction-body-coda division in messages, as is characteristic of Loron narratives. Without much of a setting of time or circumstances, the speaker starts to speak about the first topic he wants to deal with. The chief's message starts with a discourse marker *e* and an introduction-like sentence: *é i-jáo fór G* (*e* you-plural-go greet G) 'Well, you are going to greet G.' (message, clause 1).<sup>3</sup> Immediately after this, the chief gets down to business.

What then could be called the body of the message goes on until repetition of the last clause marks the end of the message. As mentioned in the introduction, the characteristic division of the body is into planes. The Loron text does not mention each element of the message in every plane, but nearly every element can be found in at least two planes.

An exception is the first plane of the chief's message, which starts out with a remark about a birth certificate. This topic is not mentioned again. But twice the chief speaks about his daughter, the future wife of his nephew,<sup>4</sup> in different planes

<sup>3</sup>A preliminary phonological analysis recognizes the following contrastive segments: stops p, t, k, kp, b, d, g, gb; implosives ɓ (=gb?), d; fricatives f (bilabial rounded lenis), s, x, v, z, gh (voiced velar); nasals m, n, gn (palatal), ng (velar); liquids r, l (=r?); semivowels w, j; vowels i, j, e, ɛ, a, ɶ, o, ɔ, u, ʊ. The vowels j, ɛ, ɔ, and ʊ have slightly lower tongue height than corresponding unmarked vowels; ɶ is slightly higher than a. Vowels can be nasalized [̃] and lengthened [:]. The vowel contrasts are given for positions of maximal differentiation (in stems, for example), but undergo various degrees of neutralization elsewhere.

Tonal contrasts have not yet been examined. The highest pitch of a phonological word is represented here by an acute accent. - separates elements that belong in the same rhythmic unit or word; / represents a short intonational break, // a longer one. As Loron is a Gur language, tone is expected to have significance. See Bendor-Samuel (1971).

The phonological form of proper names is not given here in the interests of the privacy of the individuals involved.

<sup>4</sup>The Loron are divided into matrilineal descent groups, alluded to in Clause 32 of the example, where the Loron name for G's clan is used. A child belongs to the clan of its mother

(III and V). The idea of handing her over to him so that he can go away with her is given three times in different planes (III, V, and VI).

It is very interesting to see that one highlighted point is so much emphasized that it comes up in every plane persistently. This is the chief's request, or even demand, that his nephew should come. From the point of view of the overlay pattern itself, it would not be necessary to have this in each plane, for the whole idea of the nephew coming to his uncle's place speaks loudly throughout the letter.

One characteristic of this particular message is that it is cast in indirect discourse. This is different from the normal pattern for messages.<sup>5</sup>

#### PLANES IN THIS MESSAGE

In establishing the different planes in this message, I first divided it into ten planes. But a background element outside the real intention of the message comes up several times in a way that seems to disturb the overlay pattern. The result is that my

Plane	Elements										
I.	1	2				7	8	9			
II.			3		5		7				
III.				4			7	8		11	+ background a
IV.						6	7		9		+ background b
V.		1		4	5		7			10	11 + background c
VI.		1					7		9		11 + background d

#### Topics:

1. We make contact with nephew; he is in Abidjan.
2. Birth certificate.
3. Debt.
4. The chief's daughter, G's future wife.
5. G should earn money.
6. G must warn his uncle.
7. G must come.
8. G and uncle discuss the topic for which G has come.
9. G and uncle greet each other.
10. Giving of the money.
11. Taking/giving of the wife and G's leaving after that.

Figure 1. Planes of a Loron overlay.

and bears her clan name. The cross-cousin marriage pattern with clan exogamy means that a boy's preferred first marriage partner is his mother's brother's daughter, and second choice is his father's sister's daughter. For second and following wives, he is not limited to this pattern. The chief giving the message is the brother of G's mother. He follows the preferred pattern by giving his own daughter as a wife to G.

<sup>5</sup>See footnote 2.



analysis of this text now includes only six planes, four of which include an excursus to give background information.

These six planes, given in Figure 1, constitute open sets that generate a topology, as suggested by Grimes (1975). Each element of each plane is part of the universal set {1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11}. The sets formed by the finite unions and intersections of those sets, and their unions and intersections in turn, constitute only a small fraction of the  $2^{11} = 2048$  possible subsets of the universal set.

#### CONTENT OF THE MESSAGE

In order to understand any Loron text, narrative or nonnarrative, it is important to know the Loron social structure, especially the kinship system, which is matrilineal and is tied to clan affiliations, cross-cousin marriage, and certain points of structural tension in the society. The Loron, as insider, presupposes this family frame as known to his audience.

Since the chief intended me to play the tape to his nephew, he added some extra information to the message which certainly was not necessary as far as his nephew was concerned. Once, for example, he gives his nephew's father's name and the relationship between himself and that man as background (Clause 15). In another stretch of background information (29–32) he goes into more detail about the family relationship and a certain danger element that grows out of it, but he says to the nephew: *a-má a-gí-za-na má/ le-dán-fi bi-wrá* (he-can he-know-say-that-not can/ and-find-there our-village) 'He knows that he cannot come to our village' (Clause 29 and 30).

#### OVERLAY STRUCTURE IN BACKGROUND

The background information given within Plane III (Clauses 14 to 25) is, surprisingly enough, organized in the same way as the whole message, that is as overlay.<sup>6</sup>

#### Plane Elements

I.	3
II.	1 3
III.	1 2 3
IV.	2 3
V.	1

#### Topics:

1. Family relation and danger involved.
2. G in Abidjan and his sickness.
3. G has come other years and is expected to come again.

Figure 2. Background overlay a, Plane III.

<sup>6</sup>The instances of overlay discussed by Grimes concern narrative texts only, not background.

Figure 2 shows the planes of the background overlay. The whole overlay qualifies the 'come' theme by explaining that G cannot actually come to the chief's village.

The three other stretches of background information are too short for any one of them to show overlay.

#### TYPE OF OVERLAY

The kind of overlay used in Borôro and Pidgin is called event oriented. A first impression of Loron overlay is that it is topic oriented, since the different planes seem to center around different topics of the message. Yet within each plane there is a certain time progression. Before the 'come' theme, present facts are stated first, followed by events that should take place before the nephew comes to his uncle. After the 'come' theme, there is the mention of plans and business to be done after the nephew has arrived in the presence of his uncle. So there is a strict time orientation within each plane, even though the impact of the whole is topical rather than temporal.

#### PARTICIPANT IDENTIFICATION

Tying in with the characteristic way in which the overlay structure highlights a certain topic, there is a way to keep track of the participants in the message. This is done by changing the normal order of the clause from a simple subject-verb-object order to a reprise construction.

If the subject NP is being topicalized, then it is repeated in the form of a pronoun, immediately following the full noun phrase subject. When the object NP is topicalized, the object occurs before anything else in the clause, and is repeated by a pronoun at the normal place of the object. For example: *bá-hira a-gbér gbér* (his-wife she-almost) 'his wife is almost grown up' (Clause 36) has a frontshifted subject NP *bá-hira* echoed by the pronoun *a-*. *mi-búlabo-nọ-fa faw mi-fóre bọ* (my-younger-brothers-there all I-greet them) 'I greet all my younger brothers that are there,' has a frontshifted object NP, echoed by the pronoun *bọ*.

The message can have more than one main participant referred to by a pronoun after introduction. The speaker is referred to as 'I', as in the example. The next main participant is G, the nephew. He is identified only once in the first plane, and referred to as 'he' in all other planes.

An exception is found in background *a*, where G is reidentified twice by a reprise construction of the subject NP. Both times follow the introduction of a new participant L, G's father. The ambiguity which would be present if only the third person singular pronoun were used is avoided by the reprise. The fact that the background information is mainly directed to outsiders may well play a role here.

Other reprise constructions are used for the introduction of a new participant, as in *W bọ-xwá kéré* (W they-be-not good) 'the W clan they are bad' (Clause 32), or for the reintroduction of a participant that was mentioned some planes earlier, for example *bá-hira a-gbér gbér* (his-wife she-almost) 'his wife is almost grown up' (Clause 36).

## PARTICLES

The particle *é* occurs at the beginning of a message, unless it starts with a subordinated clause. *é* can also introduce a new plane, but this is not obligatory. This particle seems to be preferred at any point where the speaker's emotions are involved. In direct speech (in message and in narrative) it is said first, before the rest of the speech. It is spoken on very high pitch.

The particle *bɔn* is a loan from French. It is used only by those who have been exposed to the French language for a longer time, without having learned to speak it well. It occurs instead of *é*; both particles are used interchangeably in one text. *Bɔn* is used more frequently, even before or after each sentence.

## MESSAGE OF THE CHIEF TO HIS NEPHEW G

*Plane I:* (1) *é i-jáo fɔr G* (Well you-plural-go greet G) 'Well, you are going to greet G.' (2) *bá lɛsɛnsill bɔ-fá bɔ-dé-o-mi dúrumu sí* (his birth-certificate, they-be-there they-tell-me lie!) 'Concerning his birth certificate, the people in the office tell me lies!' (3) *má-gi bá gbarijáíll* (I-negative-know his truth-not) 'I don't know the truth about it.' (4) *á jí ba-tí* (He-aspect come himself) 'He should come himself,' (5) *le-bí-si bá himáɛnggall* (and-we-aspect-judge his face) 'and we will arrange it in his presence,' (6) *le-fóre húng-jo wésuruwo* (and-greet he-conditional-come that-day) 'and greet him the day he comes.'

*Plane II:* (7) *é: pémo gó-mi nánako* (well, debt catch-me now) 'Well, I have got a debt now.' (8) *húng-wo wári gbérl* (he-conditional-gain money little) 'If he has earned some money,' (9) *á jí-null* (he-aspect come-with) 'he should come with it.'

*Plane III:* (10) *mí bí-nu mi-hál* (I child-with I-give) 'I give my child.' (11) *a-kúru-dang hirál* (she-wants-find woman) 'She wants to be a woman.' (12) *á jí bí sɛr sa-tánil* (he-aspect come we-aspect talk put-one) 'When he comes we will speak to make an agreement.' (13) *á tɛngo lé ngmárno* (He-aspect take, and go-away) 'He should take her and leave.'

*Background a:* (14) *nánako G ké jí* (now G habitual come) 'G usually comes now.' (15) *é: mí nébi-lɔ bɔsuwa L* (well, my nephew-be, his-father L) 'He is my nephew; his father is L.' (16) *G húng-ji dá jó:* (G he-conditional-come today exclamation) 'If G comes today really,' (17) *bɔsuwa hún dú jáo mi-su-wé suwó* (his-father he-conditional think go I-steal-him steal) 'if his father is going to think that I have stolen his son,' (18) *mé-a su-wé súwo dɛn* (I-negative steal-him steal not-at-all) 'I have not stolen him at all.' (19) *L a-kɔntilo me-tɛnu-we gbúthl* (L his-place I-treat-him well) 'I treat him well in L's place.' (20) *G hóng fí ábidjan* (G he-conditional be-there Abidjan) 'G if he is there in Abidjan,' (21) *a-kpéj a-ji-dú a-ngmár* (he-past he-come-before he-leave) 'when he came before he left again.' (22) *bɔ-la a-njɛng a-kwéje* (they-say he-be-sick he-vomit) 'They say that he was sick and vomited.' (23) *xɔ-gbérreri* (it-less) 'He recovered.' (24) *húng-ji wésuruwo jó:* (he-conditional-come that-day exclamation) 'If he comes that day!' (25) *a-kpól-dang bi-wrá jó:* (he-impossible-find our-village exclamation) 'He cannot come to our village!'

*Plane IV:* (26) *á-sum bí-ri/* (he-aspect-send us-postposition) 'He should warn us.' (27) *bí-ji téhini bákoll* (we-aspect-come Tehini here) 'We will come to Tehini,' (28) *lé-ji/ lé fọré* (and-come, and greet-him) 'and come to greet him.'

*Background b:* (29) *a-má a-gí-za-na mál* (he-can he-know-say-?-can) 'He can know,' (30) *le-dán-fi bí-wrá/* (and-find-be-there our-village) 'that he cannot come to our village.' (31) *bá-ji kọng hiná* (they-conditional-come kill him) 'If they are going to kill him,' (32) *W bọ-xwá kẹrẹ/* (W they-not good) 'the W clan they are bad.'

*Plane V:* (33) *mọ-a-fi/* (as-he-be-there) 'As he is there in Abidjan,' (34) *é a-kpási a-lául* (he-dependent he-finish) 'well, he is no longer dependent.' (35) *a-xẹ-ngmąre bí-ri dąng//* (he-make-leave us-with not-at-all) 'He does not walk in our ways any more.' (36) *nánako é bá-hira a-nánako a-gbẹrgbẹr//* (now well his-wife she-now she-little) 'Well, his wife has almost grown up now.' (37) *húng-wo gbẹrẹ/* (he-conditional-gain little) 'If he earns some money,' (38) *á-ji há-mi/* (he-aspect-come give-me) 'he should come to give it to me.' (39) *mí-ti bá-hira há/* (I-aspect-take his-wife give) 'I will take his wife to give her to him.' (40) *á-ja-nu sí/* (he-aspect-go-with exclamation) 'He should leave with her!'

*Background c:* (41) *bá kẹ fúlakẹ-njọng gi-jẹ//* (they-negative habitual deceive-him that-negative) 'They will never take her away from him.'

*Plane VI:* (42) *bá damẹ-dẹkẹ* (they-conditional find-him-really) 'If they do find him,' (43) *húng-za a-njńno wá* (he-conditional-say he-be-sick not) 'if he says that he is not sick,' (44) *á-ji bí-njwọ sí/* (he-aspect-come we-aspect-see-him exclamation) 'he should come and we will meet him!' (45) *á-ti bá hira ngmárno sí* (he-aspect-take his wife leave exclamation) 'He should take his wife and leave:!

*Background d:* (46) *bọsuwa há-hira wa-jó:/* (his-father give-wife not-exclamation) 'If his father does not give a wife,' (47) *mí-lọ há/* (I-be give) 'then I will give one.' (48) *má-za é L kpéj-ji / mí-kpéj-ji-dąn//* (I-negative-say well L past-come/ I-past-come-negative) 'I don't say that L and I are of different families!'