

INTRODUCTION

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Two major areas of interest to discourse analysts may be discerned in the papers of this volume on representative languages of Sabah, Malaysia: (1) thematic continuity and development; (2) tense-aspect and grounding.

The languages described in this volume all belong to the north-western Austronesian superstock (Dyen 1965:31). Coastal Kadazan and Kimaragang belong to the Dusunic family (or subfamily), Tombonuo to the Paitanic, and Timugon to the Murutic (Prentice 1970:378-386; Smith 1984:17). All these languages belong to the Bornean stock (Smith 1984:17). Banggi and Ida'an, however, are isolates (Moody 1984:336). The classifications have been based on lexicostatistical comparison. Extensive comparative and reconstructive studies have yet to be done for these languages, but the distinctions are generally recognised as being significant at some level. The Ida'an language as represented in the volume should not be confused with the term *Idahan* which was used by Appell (1968:9), Prentice (1970:369) and Hudson (1978:20) to refer to all languages within the Dusunic and Murutic groups. It is rather the language spoken by the group of people who refer to themselves and their language by that name.

In addition to the linguistic range represented by the languages discussed in this volume, they also represent very diverse areas geographically within the state of Sabah (see Map).

Phonological descriptions of the languages appear in Prentice (1971) and Pekkanen and Boutin (forthcoming). Studies on the grammatical system of the Kadazan/Dusun language have been written by Clayre (1966, 1967, 1970) and Antonissen (1958) and a detailed description of Timugon by Prentice (1971). Studies of Banggi, Ida'an, Tombonuo and Timugon have been published in Peck (1988). Additional information about Tombonuo, Kadazan, Banggi, and Timugon may be found in King and King (1985), Miller and Miller (1985), Boutin (1988) and Brewis (1988).

THEMATIC CONTINUITY AND DEVELOPMENT

In his introduction to a quantitative cross-language study of topic continuity in discourse, Givón recognises that topic continuity is but one aspect of a broader discourse continuity, which complements the classical Greek theatre's unity of time, place and action (1983:36, fn.4). Behind these is a nebulous "thematic continuity", "the hardest to specify, yet it is clearly and demonstrably there" (1983:8). Tomlin (1987:457f.) concurs with Givón: "critical theoretical linguistic notions" such as thematic paragraph and episode "are weakly defined

Stephen H. Levinsohn, ed. *Thematic continuity and development in languages of Sabah*, 1-6. *Pacific Linguistics*, C-118, 1991.

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and generally resistant to empirical analysis”, although “episodes are defined ultimately by the sustaining of attention on a particular paragraph level theme, a pragmatic instantiation of a rhetorical act”.

Fortunately, the concepts of “action continuity” and continuity of topic, time and place are less abstract.

Action continuity pertains primarily to *temporal sequentiality* within [a] thematic paragraph, but also to temporal *adjacency* therein ... actions are given primarily in the natural sequential order in which they actually occurred, and most commonly there is small if any temporal gap ... between one action and the next. (Givón 1983:8)

Action discontinuities then occur when actions are not given in natural sequential order, and when there is a significant temporal gap between one action and the next. (However, action discontinuities which are signalled by the topicalisation of references to temporal settings (e.g. “At mid-day”) are treated in this volume as discontinuities of ‘situation’; see below.) Changes in the TYPE of action may also be discerned as action discontinuities, for example, when narrative moves from the reporting of a conversation to events that lead from that conversation, or vice versa (see the J.K. King paper on Tombonuo, section 2.2).

Givón’s “topic/participant continuity” (1983:36) is better generalised as “continuity of situation” (Levinsohn 1987:66), in order to include continuity of time and place. “Continuity of situation” implies that the topic and “participants remain unchanged, as does the spatio-temporal situation and any other pertinent circumstances” (1987:66). Significant discontinuities of situation, in the languages described in this volume, are often signalled by topicalisation, the left-dislocation of arguments referring to topics, participants, spatio-temporal references, etc. (Crystal 1985:311). Such topicalised arguments are anaphoric (see the Brewis & Levinsohn paper on Timugon Murut, section 3).

“Thematic continuity is the overall matrix for all other continuities in the discourse” (Givón 1983:8). Consequently, there may be action discontinuity, and topics, participants and spatio-temporal situations may change “without *necessarily* changing thematic continuity” (1983:8). Several of the papers in this volume demonstrate the validity of this claim. J.K. King (section 2.2.1) and Moody (section 4.3) respectively describe how Tombonuo and Ida’an employ sentence introducers to mark maintenance of thematic continuity, when there is action discontinuity. Brewis and Levinsohn (section 3) show how Timugon Murut indicates that thematic continuity is maintained, when topicalisation signals a discontinuity of situation. What is noteworthy is that the language not only signals the maintenance of thematic continuity; it also indicates the nature of that continuity.

In connection with topic/participant continuity, King and Levinsohn describe the system of participant reference in Tombonuo and identify factors which are significant for the application of Givón’s (1983:18) iconicity principle, “the more disruptive, surprising, discontinuous or hard to process a topic is, the more *coding material* must be assigned to it”. Factors recognised include the number of major participants on stage and whether or not they are interacting (cf. Fox 1987:162), the role that they occupy, whether or not they occupy the same role as before, the highlighting of the event to which they relate and the presence of thematic boundaries (Tomlin 1987:457). A further factor is grounding; references to known participants are more weakly coded in material which is preliminary to the main events of a thematic paragraph. The thematic status of the participant concerned is also significant,

being reflected particularly in the choice of determiner. For example, one determiner is used in connection with references to the “thematic participant” (Levinsohn 1978:75) – “the participant *most crucially involved* in the action sequence running through the paragraph ... most closely associated with the higher level ‘theme’ of the paragraph” (Givón 1983:8). Changes of thematic participant either coincide with action discontinuities, or else are anticipated by choosing the appropriate determiner.

Related to thematic continuity, though not discussed by Givón, is thematic development (cf. Levinsohn 1987:83ff. for a discussion of developmental conjunctions in Koine Greek). A developmental marker typically communicates two facts about the event presented in connection with it. On the one hand, it indicates that this event develops from an earlier event presented in the discourse. At the same time, it indicates that the event concerned represents a significant new development in the discourse. In the case of Tombonuo (King, J.K., section 3.2), a set of particles indicates development from an earlier event and at the same time marks the current action as perfective, imperfective, or perfective but anticipating a further significant event. See also the Millers' paper on Coastal Kadazan (section 5), which additionally indicates whether the current event related to a punctual action or to one performed over a period of time. A further marker in Tombonuo highlights those events and situations which are particularly significant for the outcome of the story.

In other languages represented in this volume, similar particles to the developmental markers of Coastal Kadazan and Tombonuo indicate that the event concerned has “current relevance to some particular Reference Time” (Li, Thompson & Thompson 1982:22), namely in the context of narrative, to that of an action or purpose stated or implied earlier in the discourse. In both Banggi (Boutin, section 6.1) and Ida'an (Moody, sections 5.2, 4.1), markers of current relevance are different from those indicating thematic development per se.

TENSE-ASPECT AND GROUNDING

Several papers consider the relationship between tense-aspect and grounding in languages spoken in Sabah. In all the languages represented in this volume, there occurs a set of verb prefixes which prototypically reflect different degrees of inherent transitivity. In Banggi, for instance, four major verb classes or situation types are distinguished morphologically: states, achievements, activities and accomplishments (Boutin, section 3, cf. Foley & Van Valin 1984:39). Stative clauses (states) invariably express background information in narrative; background clauses “support, amplify, or COMMENT ON the narration” (Hopper 1979:215). The other verb classes all encode events. Most event clauses are morphologically unmarked for grounding (see further below). Typically, they “denote the discrete, measured events of the narrative” (Hopper 1979:215), and are therefore considered to be presenting ‘unmarked foreground events’. (Foreground events are also referred to, in this volume, as ‘mainline events’.) However, each language has devices for grounding events. In other words, they may be foregrounded (presenting highlighted foreground events) or backgrounded (presenting events downgraded in importance). One common device whose rhetorical effect is grounding is the past tense marker.

Tense, in all the languages represented in this volume, is relative. The reference time or ‘deictic centre’ for a tense in narrative is typically the time of the last event described, or the point in time referred to by a temporal adverb or an adverbial clause of time. Past tense is a marked form, used to ‘detach’ events from their context (see Waugh & Monville-Burston's

1986 analysis of the simple past in French). The rhetorical effect of this detachment is varied; it included the separation of 'boundary' events at the beginning or end of a discourse or episode from the body of the same unit (Waugh & Monville-Burston 1986:856ff.), the highlighting of climactic or unexpected events, and the signalling of an event as a flashback in relation to its context. See the papers on Banggi (Boutin, section 6.2), Coastal Kadazan (Miller & Miller, section 3.3.1), Kimaragang (Kroeger, section 4.2) and Tombonuo (King, J.K., section 2.3).

In Banggi, an unmarked non-past tense contrasts with the marked past, while auxiliaries indicate the aspectual viewpoint adopted with respect to the event presented (Boutin, section 4). In Ida'an, an unmarked non-past contrasts both with the marked past and with a verbal form which is not cross-referenced to an argument, this 'neutral tense' indicating continuity of situation with the context (Moody, section 5.1). In both languages, the non-past form or forms encode unmarked foreground events in narrative.

In the Bornean languages represented in this volume, the unmarked non-past contrasts both with a marked past and with a verbal form with 'reduced-focus' markers (Prentice (1971:219f.) calls this form "atemporal"). This 'reduced form' is the one which encodes unmarked foreground events in narrative, often in conjunction with the developmental markers referred to in section 1 (cf. the papers on Coastal Kadazan (Miller & Miller, section 3.2), Kimaragang (Kroeger, section 3) and Tombonuo (King, J.K., section 3.1)). The non-past with 'full-focus' markers is rarely used in narrative in these languages.

With the exception of Banggi, the languages represented in this volume are verb initial. Verbs carry affixes which signal what is commonly referred to as the focus of the clause. Focus corresponds roughly to voice though, as Kroeger (1988:217) points out, "the grammatical and pragmatic functions of the two systems are quite different" (cf. Schachter's 1976 discussion of focus affixes in Tagalog). The verb morphology of these languages is normally cross-referenced to and signals the semantic relationship or macrorole of a particular argument, namely the 'pivot'.

With the exception of Ida'an, which distinguishes only actor and undergoer focus, the focus system for these languages yields a richer set of possibilities than is typical of voice systems. Typically, four morphological focus distinctions are made, other focus types being derived in connection with causative and/or transitivity prefixes (see, for example, Kroeger 1988).

The markers, particularly of actor focus, may depend on the class of the verb to which they are attached (see Boutin, section 3). 'Full-focus' markers of actor focus generally include an *m* as the underlying prefix or infix. Typical 'full-focus' markers of the other basic foci in Kimaragang, Timugon Murut and Tombonuo are: *-on*, *-an*, and *i-* or *-in* (the semantic roles encoded by these last two vary from language to language). Banggi and Coastal Kadazan both have *-on* and *-an* as focus markers (*-Vdn* and *-adn*, in the case of Banggi, *d* being an epenthetic consonant), but *i-/in* does not occur as a distinct focus marker in either language. For languages with 'reduced-focus' forms, the final nasal of these affixes is typically absent or replaced.

One non-verbal argument in most clauses in these languages is marked as the "pivot" of the clause (Foley & Van Valin 1984:108), which may be thought of as a "clause-internal topic" (1984:143; cf. also Prentice 1971:30ff.). Other terms used include "subject" (e.g.

Bell 1976, 1983) and “trigger” (e.g. Wouk 1986). As mentioned above, the verbal-focus marker cross-references the pivot, and signals its semantic relationship to the predicate.

All languages have pivot and non-pivot forms of the pronouns. We describe the pivot form of the pronoun as being in the nominative case. Pronouns whose referent is a non-pivot actor are encoded in the same case (genitive) as possessive pronouns. Pronouns whose referent is a non-pivot non-actor are encoded in a different case again. In some of the languages, this three-way distinction between pivot, non-pivot actor and non-pivot non-actor is reflected also in the marking of full noun phrases. In the case of Banggi, the pivot versus non-pivot actor distinction is found only in connection with nouns whose referent is human; non-pivot non-actors are separated into core (unmarked) and oblique (marked).

In languages of the Philippines like Tagalog and Sama, definite or specific undergoers are almost invariably selected as pivots (Foley & Van Valin 1984:139f.). This is true also of Timugon Murut, but not of the other languages. In the other languages, different factors correlate with the selection of undergoer pivot. In Ida'an, for example, clauses with undergoer pivot typically provide the setting for subsequent foreground events encoded with actor pivot, and also present the results of those events (Moody, section 4.2), but otherwise are rare in narratives. In both Coastal Kadazan (Miller & Miller, section 3.3.1) and Tombonuo (King, J.K., section 1.1), marked past tense forms without an overt-focus marker are inherently in patient focus. Furthermore, it is the norm in Tombonuo for past tense forms to be cross-referenced to an undergoer pivot (King, J.K., section 3.1.1).

With the exception of Kroeger's paper on Kimaragang, the papers in this volume were produced during a three-month workshop held in 1988 in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, Malaysia.

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