STUDIES IN PHILIPPINE LINGUISTICS

Volume 3 Number 2 1979

Ross Errington. "Discourse types and tense patterns in Cotabato Manobo" 218–222

DISCOURSE TYPES AND TENSE PATTERNS[1]
IN COTABATO MANOBO[2]

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Introduction

From a practical point of view, the effective communication of a given speech act is important to the function of any discourse type. A person must identify the speech act of the speaker, if he is to understand and respond adequately. His responses will be bizarre or inappropriate if the speech act is not correctly identified.

From a linguistic point of view, one can examine the overt signals which identify the speech act involved. One way of doing this is at a lower level than discourse. A correlation can be shown between speech acts and the regular choices of a grammatical nature, thus distinguishing the various types of monologue discourse. Hence, it is quite exciting to discover the regular correlation between the functional patterns of verb tense affixes and the various discourse types in Cotabato Manobo.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to show the regular correlation between various discourse types and the verb tenses chosen in the discourse. Hopefully, this will stimulate other linguists to consider tense and discourse types in the language they are working on.

Procedure

The procedure used was to look at a collection of fourteen different texts[3], and to pick out the verb tenses of the main and subordinate clauses in each sentence, simply by underlining with colored pencils. Johnston has identified three time aspects[4] which correspond approximately to the past, neutral and future tenses[5]. These terms will be used in this discussion. For my purpose here, the imperative is considered as a separate tense.

Observations

In the text looked at, four different tenses were used to mark nuclear items in the backbone. These were future, neutral, past, and imperative. The future corresponded with explanatory and procedural, the neutral and past with narrative, and the imperative with hortatory discourses.

There were also embedded discourses, usually direct quotes. The tense within the quotes was ignored, because the scope of this paper was only the main discourse.

Also the other tenses used in the discourse regularly fell into a pattern. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

TENSE

Discourse Type	Past	Neutral	Future	Imperative
Narrative A[6]	Backbone	Background	Sequence	
Narrative B	Setting	Backbone	Sequence	
Explanatory	Setting	Collateral	Backbone	
Procedural	Background	Identification	Backbone	
Hortatory	Setting		Result	Backbone

Figure 1. Table of observed correlations between discourse type and the distribution of tense over discourse functions within clauses.

Explanation of Terms

The backbone is the event line in narrative discourse, the point line in hortatory, the step line in procedural, etc. It is distinguished from its setting, background, collateral information, and narrator comment. The backbone tense gives the discourse coherence and focal content or significance.

Events are contrasted with non-events in that they actually occur, they are overt, and they occur at the 'now' point on the time line. Identification means that the participants and props are identified, usually by a relative clause in a noun phrase.

Settings involve time and space. An initial setting takes the hearer from the I-thou-here-now speech setting to the then-there-they of a story. There is also the closing setting which brings the hearer back to the present.

Background includes straightforward information. It results from the speaker's estimate of the hearer's knowledge. It includes happenings that are off the main event line, e.g. out of sequence events, and information that the hearer needs to benefit from the full impact of the speech act but which he is presumed not to have.

Collateral tells what might have happened but didn't. It includes negatives, modals, questions, and quotations.

Sequence is what carries the story along. It includes temporal clauses within the sentence.

Result is what will happen if the imperative of the hortatory discourse is obeyed.

Narrative has as the nuclear item of the discourse, a string of nuclear events. These are joined together by their co-ordinate sequence relations. A narrative may be event oriented or participant oriented, but both are based on the string of events.

Expalanatory discourse explains an item, practice, or activity, or describes the characteristics of something. One chief characteristic is that it is non-chronological. It is arranged by topic.

Procedural discourse describes the things we do, and it is arranged in a chronological order. A procedural can also be proscriptive, made up of a string of imperatives.

Hortatory has as the nuclear item of the discourse, an imperative or command, and the subordinate items are condition, result, and reason.[7]

Evaluation and Conclusion

1. For narrative discourse, the events along the time line can be expressed in either past or neutral tense. Out of the discourses looked at, only one used past tense for the time line; most used the neutral tense. It may be that the choice of tense depends upon the speaker's perspective when he is telling the story, i.e., if he wants to create the story as having happened long ago, he would use the past tense, if he wants to tell it as if the events were happening now he uses the neutral tense. More texts need to be looked at to test this hypothesis.

2.   The limited amount of data considered does not give final proof to the conclusions. However, the data considered does show a trend which I believe is vitally important as a tool for classifying discourse types.

3.   The purpose of this paper has been accomplished. There is a regular correlation between the verb tense used and the type of discourse in Cotabato Manobo.

Application

1.   For other linguists, it should be easy to find if there exists a similar pattern in the language they are working on.

2.   For my SIL co-workers who are working on translation, the payoff is that if you can identify the speech act involved in the source language, this type of charting for the target language gives a handle whereby you can know which tenses to use for backbone and subordinate information in the discourse being translated. This will give the reader the necessary clue as to what speech act the author is using, and thus will better enable the reader to understand what is being communicated to him.

FOOTNOTES

[1] The impetus for this paper came from linguistic consultant, Dr. Austin Hale, who was first introduced to this kind of phenomenon by Hazel Wrigglesworth.

[2] Cotabato Manobo is one of the languages comprising the Manobo subgroup within the Philippine branch of the Austronesian language family. It is spoken by some 10,000 Manobo people living in the province of Sultan Kudarat (formerly Cotabato) on the island of Mindanao. The language area extends along the seacoast and inland 10-15 miles, with the Tran River as its approximate northern boundary and the town of Milbuk as its approximate southern boundary. The author began field work in Limulan, Kalamansig in 1976 under the auspices of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The author is indebted to his co-workers of the Summer Institute of Linguistics for their theoretical and practical help, and especially to E. Clay Johnston who was responsible for gathering the text material used here; and Austin Hale who served as consultant for this paper. E. Clay Johnston has done intermittent field work on the Cotabato Manobo language in Paril, Kalamansig, between 1964 and 1978.

[3]The texts used for this paper were collected by Clay Johnston between 1967 and 1976. Some were transcribed from oral material and some were written. They are listed in approximate chronological order:

TEXT: CS, 'CARRYING THE SICK MAN'; Johnston, 12/67
TEXT: PN, 'OUR THINKING ABOUT GOD'; Johnston 12/67
TEXT: BP, 'WHAT WE DO WITH RICE'; Johnston, 12/67
TEXT: OT, 'OUR TROUBLE'; Johnston, 12/67
'Amuk duen nematay diyà kenami'; Coded 73-1-OR-EL
'OUR TRIP TO NASULI'; Coded 75-1-WR-DA
'YOUR WAY TO BELIEVE'; Coded 75-2-WR-DA
'MANOBO CUSTOM OF DEATH'; Coded 75-3-WR-DA
'O Bébè Iyong'; Coded 76-1-WR-IM
'O akay Ulépék'; Coded 76-2-WR-PU
'SA ADAT DENU SA LIMUKEN'; Coded 76-3-WR-PU
'Egoh i Halen egtebow diyà kenami'; Coded 76-4-WR-PU
'SA ADAT SA MEDOO LUKES'; Coded 76-5-WR-PU
'O Bagungen'; Coded 76-6WR-PU

[4]E. Clay Johnston, 'The Verb Affixation of Cotabato Manobo', Philippine Journal of Linguistics, Volume 6, Number 1, 1975, page 38.

[5]The choice of terms is somewhat arbitrary. The author realizes that more is involved than simply past, neutral and future in relation to time. A look at other linguistic writings reveals a mixture of terms. In Cotabato Manobo, there are three distinct tense or time aspect verb affixes. Johnston has written,'that the neutral aspect may be used of both past and future actions if the time of the action is specified in the clause or context.' (op. cit., PJL 6:1, 38)

[6]Texts that were classified into each group are as follows:
Narrative A: 'Carrying the sick man'
Narrative B: 'Our trouble'; 'Our trip to Nasuli'; 'Sa adat denu sa Limuken'; Egoh i Halen egtebow diyà kenami'
Explanatory: 'Sa adat sa medoo lukes'; 'Our thinking about God'
Procedural: 'What we do with rice'; 'Amuk duen nematay diyà kenami'; 'Your way to believe'; 'Manobo custom of death'
Hortatory: 'O Bébè Iyong'; 'O akay Ulépék'; 'O Bagungen'

[7]For a fuller discussion of some of the terms in this section, see Austin Hale, Comments on the Thurman Chart: Studies in Philippine Linguistics 1.1:50-52 (1977).