

NAME: Amanda Brotchie  
INSTITUTION: University of Melbourne  
EMAIL: [a.brotchie2@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:a.brotchie2@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au) / [abrotchie@iprimus.com.au](mailto:abrotchie@iprimus.com.au)

TITLE: **Once upon a time: Form and Function in Tirax Narratives**

KEYWORDS: Vanuatu, Narrative, Reference tracking

ABSTRACT:

Tirax is a Vanuatu language spoken on the island of Malakula. Like many Vanuatu languages, Tirax has nominative-accusative morphosyntax, and obligatory subject-marking on the verb. Referents can be identified with the subject-marker alone, or in conjunction with a full NP. The aim of the paper is to account for the form and distribution of referential NPs in Tirax narratives. There is a vast literature on reference tracking in a range of languages, e.g. Givón 1983, Fox 1986, 1996, Stirling 2001. However there are some anomalies in the distribution and form of Tirax NPs that previous approaches do not account for. In this paper, these anomalies are analysed from a narrative-functional perspective.

Any clause within a narrative has a role in setting up, developing or resolving the action of the narrative. Furthermore a story must engage the audience. The audience must be able to identify with the protagonist, identify (with) his or her needs and the challenges he or she is facing. It must be able to understand the story easily, why it is being told, and follow the progression of events. The teller can also engage an audience more deeply by creating a sense of drama. Audience engagement with the story can be achieved by:

- setting up recognisable characters with clear wants and needs
- setting up and paying off twists and turns in the plot
- raising the stakes – making the challenge(s) greater, or the outcome more important,
- increasing jeopardy, the danger to the protagonist, for example by increasing the power or strength of the antagonist

and also:

- increasing the suspense
- heightening the climax

These functional pressures of story-telling are identified here to assess their influence on the form and distribution of NPs and aspect-markers in Tirax narratives.

The clauses of a Tirax narrative were analysed for their function, and the referential NPs in the narrative were tabulated. Where relevant, the poetic and dramatic impact of each referring expression was also noted. Existing theories were applied to account for the form and distribution of the items, and any anomalies were identified. The result was that these anomalies could be accounted for by referring to their function in the narrative. The advantage of a theory which includes functional features such as 'dramatic effect' to account for grammatical phenomena in narrative, is not only that it accounts for apparent anomalies, but that it reorients the research to the fundamental aim of story-telling: to engage.

REFERENCES – SUMMARY

**Narrative**

Aristotle (1996). Poetics. London, Penguin Books.

Bauman, R. (1986). Story, performance and event. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Labov, W. (1972). The Transformation of experience in narrative syntax. Language in the

inner city, University of Pennsylvania Press: pp. 354-396.

Polanyi, L. (1989). The structure of stories. Telling the American Story. Cambridge, MIT Press: pp. 15-42.

Prince, G. (1982). Narratology: The Form and Functioning of Narrative. Berlin, Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Propp, V. (1928). Morphology of the folktale, University of Texas Press.

Rimmon-Kenan, S. (1983). Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics. London & New York, Methuen & Co.

Sherzer, J. (1981). The Interplay of Structure and Function in Kuna Narrative, or: How to Grab a Snake in the Darien. Analyzing Discourse: Text and Talk. Tannen. Georgetown, Georgetown University Press: 306-322.

### **Reference tracking**

Brown, C. (1983). Topic continuity in written English narrative. Topic continuity in discourse: a quantitative cross-language study. T. Givón. Amsterdam, John Benjamins: 313-331.

Chafe, W. (1994). Activation Cost. Discourse, Consciousness and Time.

Downing, P. (1980). Factors influencing lexical choice in narratives. The pear stories. W. Chafe. Norwood, Ablex: 89-126.

Fox, B. (1986). "Local patterns and general principles in cognitive processes: anaphora in written and conversational English." Text **6**(1): 25-51.

- (1996). Studies in anaphora. Amsterdam; Philadelphia, J. Benjamins Pub.

Givón, T. (1983). Introduction. Topic continuity in discourse: a quantitative cross-language study. T. Givón. Amsterdam, John Benjamins: 5-41.

Huang, Y. (2000). "Discourse Anaphora: Four theoretical models." Journal of Pragmatics **32**: 151-176.

Prince, E. (1992). The ZPG letter: Subjects, definiteness, and information status. Discourse description: Diverse analyses of a fund-raising text. W. T. Mann, S. Amsterdam, John Benjamins: 295-325.

Stevenson, R. (2002). The role of salience in the production of referring expressions: A psycholinguistic perspective. Information sharing: Reference and presupposition in language generation and interpretation. K. v. D. R. Kibble: 167-192.

Stirling, L. (2001). "The Multifunctionality of Anaphoric Expressions: A typological perspective." Australian Journal of Linguistics **21**(1): 7-23.