

Participants in Guna Narrative Discourse

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0. Introduction

The linguistic structure of narrative discourse, such as folk tales, presents certain well-defined grammatical characteristics. One of those grammatical characteristics is the way in which participants and inanimate objects are referred to. Participants are those characters in the narrative who perform an action or towards whom an action is directed. Inanimate objects are those things in the narrative which are acted upon by the participants.

This analysis of participant reference is based on the study of three Gunu folk tales, recorded and transcribed in Ombessa, Cameroon in 1978. These were analysed during a grammar workshop of the Société Internationale de Linguistique - Cameroon - in Yaoundé in May 1979.

The Gunu language is spoken by approximately 30.000 people in the south-central region of Cameroon, in the Mbam département, in the arrondissements of Ombessa and Bokito. There are two dialects, north Gunu and south Gunu; the texts for the present study were recorded in the North Gunu dialect. The Gunu language is also known outside the area as Yambassa, and as such is classified by Guthrie (1971 : 32) as a Bantu language of the A60 (Sanaga) group. He assigns to

Yambassa the designation A62. The language is rich in folk tales and the three texts studied are all animal stories: "The tortoise, the elephant and the hippopotamus" (10), "The hare and the panther harvest yams" (17), "The tortoise wins a wife" (18). The numbers in parentheses are the references used in this study and identify the texts - and the individual sentences in it - in a large collection not yet published. All the stories have both entertainment and moralising value within the culture.

This paper will present the way in which the narrator introduces and refers to the participants and inanimate objects; specifically, the use of nouns and pronouns will be described. Each instance will be examined within its immediate context - clause, sentence - and also with reference to the rôles of the participants in the context of the whole narrative discourse.

1. Participant reference in main clauses

In main clauses the reference to the participants may be focused or non-focused. The focused reference system, which serves to highlight a particular participant, uses devices which are not part of the non-focused reference system.

1.1 Non-focused reference.

The non-focused reference system shows how participants

are referred to when no participant is being specially highlighted. The rules which pertain to the introduction and identification, the reintroduction and reidentification of participants will be described here. A special case is presented by the use of infinitive verb form, and so a distinction will be drawn between that and inflected verb forms.

1.1.1 Clauses with inflected verb forms.

Inflected verb forms differ from the infinitive form in that the former must bear a person marker, whilst the latter may not.

Each participant is first introduced by means of a noun. This is the case at the beginning of the whole discourse, and at the beginning of each episode within a particular discourse.¹ This is true whether the participant is introduced as subject or as object.

Introduction as subject, first reference in the text:

Example 1. góo kúmfu a síenemí 18:7a
 so tortoise he stays
 'So there remained the tortoise'

Introduction as object, first reference in the text:

Example 2. a yába go éda gólo okáda ba kúmfu 18:48e
 he goes to go take wife of tortoise
 slowly

'He went creeping up to take the tortoise's wife'

If the participant is first introduced in a nonsubject slot, when he becomes subject for the first time a noun

Must be used:

Example 3. a b̄s̄ édá bola naá ŋko
 he narr. past arrive at panther
 ŋko am̄ 18:39-40a
 panther he said

Once the participant has been introduced he will be referred to by a pronoun if he continues as subject in subsequent clauses:

Example 4. kímú go éda
 tortoise goes
 a b̄a gó éda go ága nco ḡsanco
 he narr. p. go put elephant cord
 a b̄a síe
 he narr. past. stay
 a. b̄a mo oyánáx am̄ ... 10:27-29
 he narr. p. him say he said

'The tortoise went and put the rope on the elephant,
 he stayed and said...'

The same is true of the object, even if a clause intervenes where the object is absent:

Example 5.

a b̄a gúné ŋko
 he narr.p. chase panther
 a b̄a gúné
 he narr.p. chase
 a b̄s̄ édá mo díligene 17: 52b-54
 he narr.p. go him chase-home

'He -hare- chased the panther, he chased,
 he chased him home'.

The corollary of this is that when the subject changes from one clause to another, the subject of the second clause must be reidentified by a noun:

Example 6.

ncúbé a gógo
Hippopotamus he pulls

ncó a gógo
elephant he pulls

ncúbé a gógo
hippopotamus he pulls

ncó a gógo 10:43-46
elephant he pulls

'the hippopotamus pulled, the elephant pulled,
the hippopotamus pulled, the elephant pulled.'

Example 7.

gagó nkó a guéneguene na bilúgu
still panther he wastes-time with yams

béhé go foanana
his grilling

kínú a mo yábana go mo gumbene 18:58-59a
tortoise he him watches to him seize

'The panther was still wasting time grilling his
yams. The tortoise was watching him, ready to
seize him.'

If two participants are acting together, referred to as 'they', then when one of the two becomes the sole actor again he must be reidentified by a noun:

Example 8.

bá gógansnomó

They (=elephant and hippopotamus) were pulling

ncúbé a na amó

10:51b-52

hippopotamus he does he-that

'They were pulling each other. The hippopotamus
made as to...'

1.1.2 Clauses with the infinitive verb form

A special case is posed by a particular form of the verb - a defocused, infinitive form². This form, which cannot take the bound pronominal prefix, may be preceded by three kinds of participant reference: zero, gché (a possessive adjective), or a noun.

1.1.2.1 Zero

In a sequence of clauses all having the same subject the zero form is used and is therefore equivalent to the use of the bound pronoun a- with inflected verbs (as shown in Example 4).

Example 9.

gšo s édamé naá niimpo

so he goes to water

go éda go éga ncúbé tšne gšance

go to put hippo also rope

go síe

10:33-36

stay to the water

'So he (tortoise) goes to the water and puts the rope on the hippopotamus also. He stays...'

1.1.2.2. Gǎhě

When the infinitive form is used at the beginning of a paragraph⁵ gǎhě is the further restriction that the events narrated in the paragraph in question must parallel those of the previous paragraph. Gǎhě is an anaphoric pronoun, and so there must be some way of identifying the participant because of what the reader already knows about him. In text 10 the tortoise has told the elephant how he is going to prove his strength, and then he goes and tells the hippopotamus the same thing. At the start of this paragraph the tortoise is referred to by gǎhě.

Example 10.

	kímfu	go	oyana	ncə	amé	...	
	tortoise	says	elephant	he	says		
<u>new</u>	bá	ba	gálédá	nǎncə			
<u>paragraph</u>	they	spoken	thus				
	gǎhě	go	éda	tǎncə	naé	ncubé	10:16a-b
	he	goes	also	to	hippo		

'The tortoise said to the elephant, "...".

When they had spoken, he went also to the hippopotamus'.

This use of gǎhě may be reinforced by the use of the noun in addition;

Example 11:

	ŋkə	gǎhě	go	mo	bésənencə	18:47
	panther	he		him	decide-against	

'The panther decided to get at him (tortoise).'

This clause introduces a new section, but the panther retains the initiative. The panther has just tried unsuccessfully to trample on the tortoise, and now decides on a new course of action with the same purpose of harming the tortoise.

1.1.2.3 Noun

The participant is referred to explicitly by a noun together with the infinitive form under the same circumstances as we have already described for the use of the noun in clauses with inflected verb forms (cf.1.1.1.).

1.2 Focused reference

We shall deal here with instances of participant reference which appear to violate the principles outlined above, but which can be explained in terms of the particular focus into which the narrator is putting the participant. In each case the participant is highlighted by the particular use the narrator makes of the reference system, a use which is all the more significant because it is unexpected in that it departs from the norm.

The participant may be highlighted because of his place in the social order (social hierarchy), his active or passive role within the story (predominance) or his particular, well-known characteristics (conventional rôle).

1.2.1 Social hierarchy

Social hierarchy may be defined as the classification by which any one culture assigns to its members a place,

more or less important, in relation to the other members of the culture. Animals are included in this classification and find a place in the social hierarchy.⁴ In Guna culture animals occupy a lower place in the social hierarchy than men.

Example 12.

1. gōō mete a bāmbamō na ombōla bshē ...
so man he was with girl his

2. gōō boyannyama bá bābābandamō
so all animals they group themselves

3. a bāle gō āga gssānā 18:2a-3d
he nar.past put basket

'A man once had a daughter (and said "...").

So all the animals came crowding round, and

he put a basket (of peppers on the fire)'.
'

In this example we would expect the man to be re-identified by a noun in line 3 for two reasons: firstly, there is a change of subject from lines 2 to 3, secondly line 3 is in a different section from line 1, necessitating the reintroduction of the participant by a noun. In fact the pronoun is used because of social hierarchy — man is higher in the social order than animals and so the pronoun refers to the participant on the higher level, making further reidentification unnecessary.⁵

1.2.2. Predominance

The way a participant is referred to may change if he is the predominant actor. The non-focused reference system is used when two participants are equal in status and

in the initiative they take within a section of a story. When one of them becomes the prime initiator of the events of a section, the narrator may choose to bring this participant into focus, by using the focused system of reference. There are two reasons why the narrator may choose to focus on a participant in this way: a. the predominance created when one participant takes and keeps the initiative, particularly when he is cast in the rôle of aggressor vis-à-vis the other participant, b. the predominance created when one participant is in focus as the hero of the story.

1.2.2.1 Initiative-taking

Example 13.

1. a bés édá naá nka
he narr.past go to panther

2. nka amó "..."
panther he said

3. a báa béfunée a dósda sbaná naá gidógódógó
he narr. take-courage he throws foot to calabash
past

4. gidógódógó gè mbsá fulúgè fueké gè ná lé
calabash it rem.narr. jump long time it already is
héeni néeni
over there

5. a báa síéné a dósda sbaná go cí 18:39-43b
he narr. stay he throws foot to ground
past.

'He (tortoise) went to the panther. The panther said "...". He took courage and kicked at the calabash, but the calabash had already jumped and was far away. He stayed where he was and his foot landed on the ground'.

In this section the action passes from the tortoise (line 1) to the panther (line 2 ff.). Apart from line 1 where a pronoun is used, the tortoise is referred to as a calabash which he had previously entered. This defocuses the tortoise, and he is in fact concealed from view by his calabash, so the linguistic device parallels the actual event. The panther is then the participant in focus and the initiative at this point in the story lies with him - he is trying to do away with the tortoise. Because of this focus the panther is not reidentified by a noun in line 5 expected, since the subject of the intervening clauses was the calabash (tortoise). Instead the personal pronoun is used in line 5, as though another subject had not intervened.⁶

1.2.2.2 Hero rôle

Example 14.

- | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----|-------|----------|--------|------|------------|-------|
| 1. | gòo | a | gələmó | moóma | naá | ɲka | |
| | so | he | takes | things | from | panther | |
| 2. | a | báa | gó | dála | naá | mshé | moóma |
| | he | narr. | put | on | his | things | |
| | | | past | | | | |
| 3. | gòo | bí | úlenyemí | moóma | | | |
| | so | they | remove | things | | | |
| 4. | amó | | | | | 17:25a-26c | |
| | he | said | | | | | |

'So he (hare) took some of the panther's things and put them on top of his. Then they took their things off (the fire) and he said, "...'

In this tale the hare, who is the main character, is trying to outwit the panther and in this section is taking the initiative to deceive him. The hare, because he is the predominant actor in the section (and also hero of the story; see also below 1.2.3.3), is reintroduced simply by the pronoun a- in amó 'he said'. Here we would expect a noun, firstly because, there is a paragraph break between lines 2 and 3, and secondly, because the subject of the previous clause is the plural bá -here as the variant bú- 'they' -cf. 1.1.1-

1.2.2.3 Return to equal status

Where the participants return to equal status and neither predominates, the general rules of reidentification by a noun apply (cf. 1.1). At the end of the section of text 18 (example 13), when the panther has terminated the actions he initiated, both tortoise and panther return to equal status:

Example 15

Esáá kínúú a mba lé a mo yábana
 however tortoise he rem. cop. he him watch
 past

gagó ŋka a guéneguene na bilúŋu bññé
 still panther he wastes-time with yams his
kínúú a mo yábana 18:57-59a
 tortoise he him watches

'However, the tortoise was watching him. Still the panther was wasting time with his yams. The tortoise was watching him.

1.2.3 Conventional rôle

The narrator may identify participants by the actions they perform or the words they say without making use of the usual (non-focused) reference system. This may work in three ways:

a. the form of address which one participant uses for another may identify the speaker, where other reference to him is lacking.

b. the previous actions performed by the participant in the story may be of such a kind that the subsequent actions could only be undertaken by the same participant and confusion is therefore not possible. If, for example, a participant has been hunting and then later, without being reidentified, comes home with the game, the hearer is in no doubt about the identity of the participant.

c. the nature and characteristics of a participant may be fully known to the hearer (either from previous stories or from the place the participant always occupies in the culture), and so certain actions will be expected to be performed by him alone, even if he is not specifically reidentified at that point.⁸

1.2.3.1. Form of address

Example 16. ŋko go góló kuḡgulu
 panther takes (noise of tam-tam)
 amó 'Ncóó, baba....
 he said 'give to me, papa....

17:38-39

The panther took the tam-tam 'kuḡgulu'. He said
 'Give it to me, papa...'

The expectation is that the panther is doing the saying as he is the subject of the previous clause. We know, however, that it must be the hare, as he uses the form of address 'Papa' which he would use to the panther who is bigger than he is.

1.2.3.2 Previous actions

Example 17.

go	dómba	nnyama	nykimée	púmi	
	pass	animal	every	completely	
go	gúluge	naá	nnyaná		18:46a-b
	'He went past every single animal and went back home'				

In this case we have no formal identification who the participant is, and the infinitive form which may be unmarked for person is used (see footnote 2). The example occurs in the text after a minor break. We can, however, be sure that the tortoise is the subject of both clauses as the previous events had shown him going past each animal in turn with impunity. No other participant in the story could therefore fill this rôle. The narrator here uses the actions the participant performs in relation to those he has already performed to identify him.

1.2.3.2 Known characteristics

In example 17 above the tortoise is further identified as the subject of the two clauses by the fact that the hearer expects him to escape harm, because of his rôle as a hero in Gnu folk tales.

In one case the narrator uses a descriptive phrase to identify a participant. The hare, hero of the story of the hare and the panther who harvest their yams (text 17), is referred to as:

Example 18.

muənó	ba	dadáa	17:20b
child	of	ancestor	

Thus the narrator identifies the hare as a member of his own ancestral group. The motivation for this may be that both narrator and hare share the same skill and cunning, characteristics which are usually attributed to the hare in Gunu folk tales.

1.3. Identification of speakers

It is sometimes difficult to identify who is speaking in a dialogue. In a dialogue of normal speed the rules of the usual reference system apply; it is in rapid exchanges of dialogue that the identity of the speaker may be unclear.

1.3.1 Normal dialogue

The initial speaker is identified by the usual system of participant reference, focused or non-focused, as we have already described it. The responding and subsequent speakers are identified by nouns. This in fact follows the rule that when the subject changes from one clause to the next the noun must be used (cf. 1.1.1).

Example 19.

amó gá ncúbé amó "..."
 he said hippo he said
 ncúbé amó "..."
 hippo he said
 kímúu amó gáshé amó "..."
 tortoise he said to him he said
 'He (tortoise) said to the hippopotamus "...'
 The hippopotamus said "... The tortoise
 said to him "...

10:16d-20

1.3.2. Rapid exchanges

In a rapid exchange of dialogue, however, the reference to the responding speaker may be deleted:

Example 20.

1. cédi amó gáshé amó "..."
 hare he said to him he said "..."
 2. amó "..."
 he said "..."
 3. cédi amó "..."
 hare he said "..."
 'The hare said to him "... He said "...'
 The hare said "...

The speaker in line 2 is not the hare but the panther.

This deletion is permitted only once, as the speaker (the hare) is explicitly encoded as a noun again in line 3.

Schematically a dialogue between A and B may be represented as follows, with unfilled quotation marks to indicate what is said, and a capital letter to indicate encoding by a noun:

A "..."

"... (B deleted)

A "..."

In the folk tales studied so far no one dialogue has exceeded three exchanges.

2. Participant reference in subordinate clauses

In subordinate clauses the system relies on a much heavier use of nouns and it does not fit into the system used in main clauses. If a participant is introduced at the beginning of a section in a subordinate clause by a noun, the noun will be used again in the main clause:

Example 21.

ana	ɲka	a	mboó	ǎbó	nóono
when	panther	he	rem.narr. past	hear	thus
	ɲka	amó			17:41-42a
	panther	he	said		

'When the panther heard this, he said'

3. Reference to inanimate objects

Inanimate objects do not initiate action, but are used or acted upon by the participants in the events of the narrative.

An inanimate object is introduced by a noun, but pronominal reference may be used subsequently within a section for the same form of the noun.

The fire (text 17) is introduced in the first episode by a noun fyuke (line 10) and is then referred to pronominally há cédi '(fire) of hare (line 11),

há nka '(fire) of panther' (line 12b), where há contains the class marker h of iyuke 'fire'. This pronominal reference holds throughout this episode. Within the episode the narrator uses the plural form of 'fire' maiyuke muimée 'all fires!' (line 15c), referring to them with a noun. When subsequently he refers to anyone or the fires (sing.) within the same episode, he uses a pronominal form héhé 'his (fire)' (line 16c), as confusion between the singular and plural forms is not possible.

In texts 10 and 18 nouns are used exclusively for reference to inanimate objects. In these texts they are less clearly linked with the participants. The pronominal reference to inanimate objects may be used only where they can be identified in terms of the participants, otherwise the noun must be used.

When the possessive adjective is used on its own, héhé 'his (fire)', méhé 'his (things)', it always refers to the subject of the sentence:

Example 22

a	báa	fénégánéna	héhé	17:13
he	narr.	past reinforced	his	
'He (hare) reinforced his (own) fire'				

Reference to another third person must be explicit:

Example 23.

a	gedegedie	na há	cédi ké na	héhé ké	17:19b
he	tends	and of	hare also and his	also	
'He (panther) tended both hare's fire and his own'					

4. Summary

All participants must be introduced by a noun, but subsequent reference to them will depend on their rôle in the story. The main character (agressor, hero) may be referred to by a pronoun, even in cases where a noun would be the norm, if the narrator chooses to identify him as the main participant of that section. The secondary participant(s) must, however, be encoded by a noun wherever they need to be reidentified. Except in rapid exchange, participants in dialogue are referred to by a noun. A noun is used each time to identify inanimate objects unless they can be referred to in terms of their relationship to the participants.

Notes:

1. Episode indicates the next unit below the discourse level. For further definition of this unit, and its distinguishing features, see Robinson, 1979, "The structure of a Gunu narrative text", ms.
2. It is called here infinitive because it cannot be inflected for tense and takes no person marker. It may not bear any clause level inflection and is marked by an infinitive prefix go-.
3. Episodes in Gunu are composed of paragraphs, these of settings, incidents and outcomes, as described in Robinson, ms.
4. In the preface to his collection of folk tales B. Diop, (1958:10-14) assigns animals a place alongside men and women.
5. For a similar notion of social hierarchy, termed 'order of prominence', see V.F. Kondo, 1977.
6. For a similar example of changing the focus on participants, by the use of suffixes, see N. Wiebe, 1977.
7. amó is a speech introducer marked only for person, not for tense, e.g. amó 'he said', goamó 'you (sg.) said', etc.
8. Similar identification of participants by their cultural rôle was observed in Longuda (Nigeria) by J F. Newman, 1978.

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