Discourse structuring elements in Lakurumau narratives

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In this talk, I will describe the discourse functions of the particle asang ‘new situation’, the TAM marker daa ‘irrealis; future’ and the verb ramazik ‘get up’ in narrative texts in Lakurumau, a previously undescribed Oceanic language of New Ireland (Papua New Guinea). All data come from my own fieldwork (2017-2019).

Asang and daa have a grounding function. Following Hopper (1979), I refer to the events that bring forward the actual story line as ‘foreground’ and to the events that support the foreground and do not themselves narrate the story as ‘background’. In Lakurumau, both can be in the unmarked realis, which can express both past and present reference and is the default choice for narratives. Often, however, foreground events are marked by the particle asang and background events by the irrealis/future daa. Asang-marked predicates bring forward the storyline while daa-marked predicates expand on it, encoding events seen as habitual or persistent and referring deictically to the present of the narration (the ‘speaker-now’; Fleischman 1972). In (1) the background (in square brackets) provides information about the magician-warrior Malaxon and his magic plant (a Cordyline australis).

(1) Orait nam Malaxon asang ka ramazik, di ramin asang a yaan aa xa xus a mu piu zana. Ka gonin asang naadi wana mu mos pena waan lo vezop. [Aa naan, nam Malaxon akam, a vuna roi moxom a waxaana si. Taim… kain taatai uruxaam… taim gu daa rapin maan a ron sim, ka daa tepin kam pana si.]

‘All right, Malaxon got up ASANG, they decided ASANG a date (for the battle, LM) and he told it to his warriors. He prepared ASANG them to go to the battle. [And him, that Malaxon, he used to hold a leaf of Cordyline australis. When… this kind of men… when you will throw your spear, he will fan it away with the Cordyline australis.]

I argue that the discourse functions of daa and asang can be directly derived from their semantics. The basic function of daa is to encode typical irrealis functions, including habituality, and to express future tense reference: the latter is re-analysed as ‘speaker-now’ reference in discourse. Asang expresses meanings typically related with already and perfect grams, such as an earliness implication, change-of-state with stative predicates and a ‘new situation’ with dynamic predicates (Krajinović 2019). Its function as a foregrounding device is consistent with this semantics: asang-marked events are seen as contrasting with the previous ones and thereby inherently marking a development in the story line.

The verb ramazik ‘get up’ has the function of signaling the shift to a new episode or to a new scene within the same episode, even when the physical act of getting up is only weakly hinted at or
absent at all. In (2), from a Frog Story text, only the first two occurrences of *ramazik* means really ‘get up’: the other two are only discourse devices.

(2) Nadai asang di *ramazik*, di raxamaai asang, a vikaba gof asang ka zeze lau wana. Ka zeze asang aay a waau asang a maalik. Saa di inaxamaai asang o daa sanguvaai asang a waau. Okay, di *ramasixaai* asang, di sanguvaai a lena flu, di sanguf a mu nombina kaavus akam, a lena shoes, a mu mos lo lena flu. Di sanguf a waau, ka vit di tangin a waau. Di *ramazik* asang, di *ramazik* asang, di vexusaai asang o daa waan di sanguf a waau. Aay a wiu xa *ramazik*, ka valaak a vaatna lo lena vikaba aaya naa xa miskin.

‘The two of the got up, they looked, the empty container was lying on top of it. It was there and the frog had disappeared. And they thought that they will look for the frog. Okay, they got up, they searched the house, they searched all those places, inside the shoes, all the things in the house. They looked for the frog, they didn’t find the frog. They got up, they got up, they decided that they will got to look for the frog. And the dog got up, he put its head into the bottle and he sniffed it.’

**References**

