

Bridging and backstitching in Latgalian oral folktales

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The topic of this paper is patterns where a verb is repeated to add cohesion to parts of oral narratives. The language investigated is a Latgalian dialect (Indo-European, Baltic, Eastern Latvia) as represented in a corpus of oral folktales collected at the end of the 19th century. I will describe forms and functions of these patterns and discuss whether they are instances of *bridging constructions* as understood in the typological literature, and how the Latgalian data may broaden our understanding of bridging and other repetitive constructions.

Some patterns found in the corpus correspond exactly to the comparative concept of bridging construction as defined by Guérin & Aiton (2019, 2-3): the bridging clause recapitulates the content of a preceding reference clause and is followed by a third clause with new content that is sequentially ordered and foregrounded. Extract (1) shows such a pattern. The reference clause is underlined, the bridging clause is in bold, and the third clause is marked by double underscore.

- (1) *Pa-ēde tuos galis,*
PVB-eat.PST.3 DEM.GEN.SG.F meat.GEN.SG
'They ate up their portion of meat'
atzastuoja nu golda nūst, –
PVB.RFL.stand.PST.3 from table.GEN.SG off
'[and] rose from the table.'
pa-ād-uš-i *i* *soka tāvs iz dālu:*
PVB-eat-PST.PA-PL.M ADD say.PRS.3 father.NOM.SG to son.ACC.SG
(literally:) '(they) having eaten up, the father said to his son:'

The foregrounding of the third clause is here additionally expressed by the additive focus particle *i* and the switch from past to present tense. The verb of the bridging clause has the form of the past active participle, which marks it as a non-main clause predicate and signals anteriority. It requires same-subjectness (here, the subject of the main clause is included in the plural subject of the participle and the reference clause). Typically, the bridging clause repeats only the verb, more rarely also arguments of the reference clause. The bridging clause may be separated from the reference clause by another clause, as in the example, but usually it follows immediately. A variant of this construction uses the simultaneous converb.

According to Guérin & Aiton's (2019) definition, the bridging clause is at the beginning of a new discourse unit, and they mainly consider instances where this discourse unit is a paragraph. In my corpus, a more frequent type of bridging construction closes a paragraph rather than initiates the next. The main clause following the bridging clause expresses movement away from the scene of action. Only after that, a new paragraph begins. This pattern may be described as "(enters scene [...]) – does x – **having done x** – exists scene". While it has the same form, the discourse function of this pattern differs from typical bridging – it only recapitulates without initiating something new.

What all patterns discussed in this paper have in common is the repetition of a predicate, which brings no new information but outlines the action and makes the text more coherent. A suitable metaphor is that of *backstitching*, cf. the explanation of the backstitch in Wikipedia: “In embroidery, these stitches form lines and are most often used to outline shapes and to add fine detail to an embroidered picture. [...] In hand sewing, it is a utility stitch which strongly and permanently attaches two pieces of fabric.” <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Backstitch>

References

- Guérin, Valérie & Grant Aiton. 2019. Bridging Constructions in Typological Perspective. *Studies in Diversity Linguistics* 24. 1–44.
- Guérin, Valérie & Grant Aiton (eds.). 2019. *Bridging Constructions*. Berlin: Language Science Press.