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11. Structuring the content

In the two previous chapters, I described the major features that are structuring the discourse: an intricate pattern of pauses supports the clause-final topic **ǫ** to structure the discourse. The multifunctional use of the topic and the definite marker **ǫ** underline the actions in the story. In the present chapter, I will describe other features that the performers use when structuring the content. I will describe the syntactic and pragmatic functions in the discourse, which are the use of movement and non-movement verbs, and the alternation of direct speech and reported speech. Furthermore, I will discuss the rhetorical phenomena of the performance. The chapter ends with an analysis of the way of speaking of the audience.⁸²

11.1. Discourse features of **hwènúxó**

The performance of the **hwènúxó** is a current speech event that reports events that happened in the past or that might have happened in the past. Performers choose how they present the succession of the events that compose the story. The performers frequently use the bare verb that the French missionaries called ‘le narratif’ that has an aoristic aspect and conveys the past and the present (Guillet and Dujarier 1973: Verbe 4). They present the events in a logical order, which is the order that they estimate optimal to stage the performance. However, this logical order is not necessarily the chronological order of the events.

The performers use movement and non-movement verbs to convey the past actions and events. They use SAY-verbs to relate the reported speech of the agents. The performer uses static and dynamic verbs in the song of the central participant.

Movement and non-movement

The performers use movement-verbs to convey a movement, and they use non-movement-verbs to convey a state (see 1.1.4.). It is obvious that the majority of the verbs in stories are movement-verbs. Movement-verbs convey the movement from one place to another place. They are also giving new information about the actions that move the story forward. The narrative discourse uses movement-verbs to underline the movement of the agents: ‘to go to a place’ or ‘to come from a place’. The following verbs are frequently used: **yĩ** ‘to go’, **wá** ‘to come to’, **nyĩ** ‘to throw’, **yĩ** ‘to get’, **gbɔn** ‘to go past’ and so on. The end and the start of a paragraph often show the occurrence of the verb ‘go’ in the tail-head construction that links paragraphs (see 10.1.).

⁸² The analysis of pauses and the description of **ǫ** show that the structure of songs differs from the narrative discourse. This ‘code switching’ is described in Style, in 15.2.

Performers use non-movement-verbs as **ɖò** ‘to be without moving’ and **nɔ̀** ‘to stay’ to convey quietness and stability. However, the unfolding story proves the contrary, for the disturbance is imminent. When the performer for example says ‘she left the saucepot in the hut’, the audience knows that something is bound to happen (AC 2).

Dujarier was the first author who used the concept of non-movement- and movement-verbs: ‘Le mouvement et le non-mouvement s’expriment par les verbes.’ (Guillet and Dujarier 1973: 1, *Mouvement et Position*). This concept is appropriate to the categories of verbs that have the lead in the narrative discourse.⁸³

Performers express space by a specific combination of a verb phrase plus a noun phrase. They add a locative noun to a minimal Serial Verb Construction (SVC) of motion verbs that semantically encode the trajectory, for it is inherent to the verb’s meaning. The VP consists of a motion SVC that consists of two verbs. The location is conveyed by a NP that consists of two nouns of which the second noun indicates the specific location. The translation in English or French shows that a locative noun is a preposition.

Let us consider two passages that show the pleonasm of a SVC and a position noun. The first fragment stems from ‘The sadist co-wife’. It depicts the eldest co-wife who wants to eat some of the sauce of the second co-wife, and therefore enters her hut. The example shows the combination of the minimal serial verb construction **yí byó** ‘get enter’ that conveys the movement together with the locative noun **mè** ‘interior’:

bó yí byó xɔ́ ɔ́ mè [0.74]

CJss get enter hut DEF LOC

‘and the first co-wife entered the hut of the younger co-wife’ (AC 2: 25)⁸⁴

The second fragment depicts the second co-wife who returns from the market in the evening, and wants to fetch her sauce that she cooked that morning. She is about to discover that somebody spoiled her sauce. The minimal SVC and the locative noun in the first utterance convey the movement **yí zé** ‘to get lift’. The second utterance shows the irrealis marker **ná**, and a minimal split SVC ‘**zé (nùsúnnú) ɖó** ‘lift (sauce) apply’ which indicates the movement to the indirect object that is followed by the locative noun **jí** ‘top’:

⁸³ See also Style, 13.2. the role of the non-perfective marker; 13. 4. the locative marker, and 14.2. the adjunct **din ɔ́** that has the function of a deictic marker that signals a new action in the chronology of the story.

⁸⁴ Note that the adjunct **gbè** ‘in’ is used instead of **mè** after the nouns **xwé** ‘house’, **azǎn** ‘day’, and **glé** ‘field’.

bó yí zé nùsúnnú.zén [0.60]

CJss get lift sauce.GEN.pot
‘and she fetched the saucepot’

bó **ná** zé nùsúnnú **d’ado** **ji** ɔ [0.44]

CJss IRM lift sauce put.on.fireplace LOCTOP_{CL}
‘and when she would lift the sauce to put it on the fire’

o **mì** **kó** dò **lin-gǎn** dò [0.56]

IJ faeces OSM be long.time-big be
‘oh the big excrement had already hardened in’

nùsúnnú-zén mè [0.37]

sauce-GEN.pot LOC
‘inside the saucepot’

‘And she fetched the saucepot; and when she would lift the sauce to put it on the fire, oh! the big excrement had already hardened, it was floating in the saucepot!’ [AC 2: 41-44]

The SVC **yí wá** ‘go come to’ plus the noun **asá** ‘leg’ or ‘thigh’ conveys the meaning ‘at the foot of’, ‘under’ as the following example shows:

é yí wá **atín-’sá** ɔ [0.47]

3SG go come tree-LOC TOP_{CL}
‘when she arrived under the tree’ [AC 16: 257]

The SVC **flé sìn** ‘fall off’ plus **ji aga**, which is an accumulation of two nouns that both mean ‘top’, describe the deadly fall of the leopard:

é flé sìn **loko-ji-aga**

3SG fall GEN iroko-LOC-LOC
‘she fell off the uppermost top of the iroko tree’ [AC 16: 317]⁸⁵

Finally, the noun **dò** ‘hole’ means ‘down’, for example in **nyì dò**.

bò **yè** **zé** **gedε** nyì dò [0.53]

CJds 3PL lift chain throw LOC
‘and they threw the chain down’ [AC 16: 323]

A special example of spatial motion is the Fongbe verb **nǎ** ‘to give to’ that is also used as the locative noun **ná** or **nú** ‘for’ that precedes the indirect object personal

⁸⁵ Note that Fongbe grammar has neither comparative nor superlative.

pronoun **é** ‘him’ or ‘her’. The performance shapes the combination to **n̄i** ‘for him’ or ‘for her’ (see the example on p. 173f., and appendix 2: A 4: 97, 99, 142). The gliding tone consists of an ascending tone that falls at the end of an utterance and therefore is followed by a pause. The following locative nouns also occur: the noun **gǔdò** ‘back’ conveys ‘behind’. The noun **àkpá** ‘side’ means ‘next to’. The noun **àsí** ‘hand’ conveys ‘in possession of’ or ‘with’. The noun **nukòn** ‘forehead’ means ‘in front of’. The noun **gbě** ‘hunting’ or ‘fishing’ is used as **gbé** and conveys a purpose or an intention.

Direct Speech and Reported Speech

The performers use direct speech to tell the successive actions and events of the story. On the other hand, the agents speak in reported speech. The agents do not speak with one another, for the performers stage them in successive separate paragraphs. Let us recall that agents are no characters, but a function or a status (see 5.3.). The performers place their first encounter at the denouement that shows a dialogue in reported speech, when the agents blame one another for the incident. The central participant who is the only character in the stories uses direct speech in songs.⁸⁶

Performers deliver the reported speech in complement clauses that express the remarks or opinions of one the agents. The complement clause is preceded by verbs, like **ɖɔ** ‘say’ or **tuun** ‘know’, henceforth I will call these verbs ‘SAY-verbs’. SAY-verbs use complementation: ‘the woman said that she went to the market’, or ‘she said that she went to the market’.

The construction of complement clauses is the following: {SAY + complementizer}. Complement clauses in storytelling lavishly enhance the construction, for the following versions occur: **ɖɔ ɖɔ** and **ɖɔ ji**, or **ɖɔ (ɖɔ) ɖé** or simply **ɖɔ**. The stories show many variations that differ from the existing Fongbe grammars. Guillet noted **é ɖɔ nú ní ɖɔ** ‘he said to me that’ (Guillet 1973 a: 50). Höftmann noted **měsì ɖɔ nú ví lé ɖɔ jí** ‘the teacher said to the children that (...)’ (Höftmann 1993: 195). Lefebvre noted **é ɖɔ nú mǐ ɖɔ** ‘he said to me that’ (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 116).

The complementizer **ji** is the indirect discourse particle **ji** that marks insistence; it is also used as the final particle of an indirect question (Segurola 1968: 35). In the performance, **ji** has the function of the complementizer of the SAY-verb, and as the

⁸⁶ The central participant does hardly speak in public, which is in line with the expected cultural behaviour of powerful people; but the central participant may sing a song, see chapter 15.

clause introducer of the subordinate clause. The particle has the two following forms when it is used as a final particle: **aji** or **deji**.⁸⁷

The performers express negation in different ways, depending on the use of direct or indirect speech. Simple yes/no clauses use the common negative particle **ǎ**. In indirect speech, the performers use the following periphrastic constructions:

{**kún** + V + **ó**}
{NEG + V + NEG}

Or

{**ma** + V + **ǎ**}
{NEG + V + NEG}

Performers use these constructions also in embedded clauses, for example:

é wá é ḍ̌ é mí-lé kun ko yì xɔ gudo
CL₃ come CL₃ say LOG-self NEG already go hut LOC

bo yi lè wǔ lóló ó
CONJss go wash body even NEG

‘she finally said that she had not yet gone behind the hut, and had not yet bathed’

[AC 4: 218]

The performers place the final particle **ace**, or **’ce** after a vowel, at the end of an utterance, if the speaker expects a negative answer.

The performers in Ayou who spoke **Ayizogbe** also used the negative particle **ǎ** in yes/no-clauses. However, they used the following negative periphrastic construction in indirect speech:

{**ma** + V + **gé**}
{NEG + V + INS}
‘not at all’, ‘absolutely not’

The logophoric pronoun **émi** plays a vital role after SAY-verbs. The logophoric pronoun indicates the referential identity of the person who speaks or thinks with the subject of the reported speech. This is often ‘he’, ‘she’, or ‘they’ (Guillet 1973 a: 50ff.; Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 78ff.). In the scene that follows the

⁸⁷ The assumption that **aji** is a combination of ‘the question particle adjunct **à** and the noun **ji** ‘top’ {**Q** + **on**} is ill founded (Lefebvre and Brousseau 2002: 158). The noun **ji**, ‘top’, takes the meaning of the preposition ‘on’ only in postposition after another noun, when it has the function of a locative, for example **atin ji** ‘in the tree’ (see also 13.4.).

denouement, the guilty agent may use the logophoric pronoun **émi** in the breaking news scene.

The performer refers to the pair of agents either by their function or status, or by a personal pronoun.⁸⁸ Previous grammars exhaustively described the personal pronouns. Fongbe personal pronouns have the following three forms: clitic, anaphoric, and logophoric. The pronominal clitic is preferred in daily speech. Performers often use both the clitic and anaphoric pronoun: **é** or **éyé**, that is ‘he’ or ‘she’ to refer to the agents: The pronominal clitics **un** ‘I’ and **a** ‘you’ are seldom used in the narrative discourse. This is because of the difference between conversation and narrative. In narrative, one uses the third person, whilst speech uses ‘I’ and ‘you’.

On the other hand, the pronominal clitics **un** ‘I’ and **a** ‘you’ are often used in the songs by the central participant (Ay 2, AC 1, AC 2, AC 4, AC 7, AC 19, A 3, A 4). The anaphoric pronoun **nyé** ‘I’ sometimes occurs in songs and in the rare monologues (AC 9, A 5). The anaphoric personal pronoun **hwi** (2 SG) is also used (AC 4, A 4). The possessive pronoun is also used (AC 7, A 3). Even the plural **mi** ‘we’ occurs, for example in the song of the termites (Ay 7, AC 4, A 4).

11.2. Rhetorical phenomena

This section discusses the rhetorical phenomena that the performers use to highlight specific utterances that announce a major development in the story. I will show that the performance of storytelling uses a number of rhetorical phenomena as a way of speaking.

The structure of the plot of a story becomes visible in the plot points as the peak and the denouement. The structure appears also in the arrangement of utterances, for example in a flashback, a flash forward or a cliff hanger (Todorov 1966: 139; Hart 2011: 11ff.). A number of performers use the flashback to introduce the central participant. Furthermore, the stories show two rhetorical devices that intensify suspense: the flash forward and the cliff hanger. I described these devices in the chapter about pauses (see chapter 9).

⁸⁸ The section about the agents, for example ‘the king of the country’ discusses statuses and functions (see 5.3.).

The introduction of the central participant

The performer introduces the central participant in the main clause that immediately follows an adverbial clause that pictures a flashback. Notice that this WHEN-clause ends with the clause-final topic, but that the utterance continues. Notice that the performer does not insert a pause after the clause-final topic, but continues speaking, and launches the central participant whilst tagging him with the definite marker *ǎ* to make sure that the audience takes in that this information is relevant. The performer deliberately leaves out the pause to emphasize the flashback that introduces the central participant. The following example shows the flashback that introduces the central participant in the third paragraph of the story of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

bó ǎǎdó axì [1.38]

CJss set.off market

‘and she was on her way to the market’

bó yì axì [0.83]

CJss go market

‘and she went to the market’

ée xwè yì gbé ǎ é ǎǎ nùsúnnú ’né ǎ [0.81]

CI go go PURP TOP_{CL} CL₃ prepare sauce DEM_R DEF

‘before she left, she cooked that very sauce’

ǎǎ nùsúnnú ’né ǎ ganjì bò nùsúnnú ǎ fè-wǔ

prepare sauce DEM_R DEF well CJds sauce DEF dust-body

‘she was good at cooking that sauce. And the sauce was delicious’ [0.96]

bó ǎǎ dó zèn ǎ mē bó ka ǎǎ kpeǎǎ

CJss prepare put pot DEF LOC CJss but eat some

‘and she cooked it in the pot and, well, she tasted some’ [1.16]

bó jó é kpo ǎ dó [1.07]

CJss leave RES leave DEF put

‘and she put away the rest’

‘And she was on her way to the market. She went to the market. Before she left, she cooked this sauce, cooked this delicious sauce. And the sauce was delicious. And she cooked it in the pot, and well, she tasted some and put away the rest.’ [AC 2: 14-19]

In this example, the first utterance shows the last utterance of the second paragraph of the story. The new paragraph starts with the repetition of the previous clause. The

third utterance is a flashback to bring to mind that the woman cooked a sauce before she left. The performer indicates the introduction of the central participant by the omission of the pause after the clause-final topic **ǎ** and by placing the remote demonstrative pronoun and the definite marker after the relevant noun {**ené** + **ǎ**}. The performer acknowledges the entrance of the central participant as *pars pro toto*: the sauce. The fourth utterance repeats the crucial clause, and adds that the sauce is delicious. The fifth utterance of this example introduces the saucepot, and the last utterance of the example is a flash forward of the role of the saucepot.

The peak

The performance starts with a small number of paragraphs to introduce the agents and the topic. Then the entrance of the central participant and his qualities go on stage. Soon the central participant meets with an incident that compels him to act. This is the peak of the story. The peak sets the story in motion. The sequences after the peak teach us how to deal with the world. Therefore, the action rises, and the actions follow one after another in an increasing pace that only stops at the denouement, which is also the end of the story.⁸⁹

The performance requires a careful timing that I explained in the chapter about pauses (see 9). The performer partitions the telling of the upcoming incident by splitting up the actions of the pair of agents. Let us consider for example, the story of ‘The sadist co-wife’ when the performer tells the audience the almost trivial detail that Agent A cooks a sauce before she goes to the market (AC 2, A 5). These actions, cooking and going to the market, seem to have no link with the topic of jealousy that the performer told in the introduction. On the other hand, when the performer continues and comments on the sauce as a delicious spicy sauce, the sauce and the saucepot, in which the sauce is cooked, are marked by the definite particle **ǎ**. At that very moment, the audience gets the message that the saucepot is the central participant, and that somehow a dramatic incident will happen to the sauce and the saucepot. Let us look at the following example that shows the peak of the Abomey-Calavi version of ‘The sadist co-wife’:

é sǎ nǔ [0.15]
 CL₃ take thing
 ‘she positioned herself’

⁸⁹ The Fongbe **hwènùxó** has one action peak. The didactic or thematic peak that Longacre described does not occur in the corpus (Longacre 1990: 8).

é [0.44]

CL₃

‘she’

ván yɔnu tɔn [0.55]

open thigh GEN

‘opened her arse’

bó nyè mĩ kɔn dó nùsúnnú ɔ mè [2.54]

CJss throw excrement pour drop sauce DEF LOC

‘and she defecated into that lovely sauce’ [laughter] [AC 2: 32-35]

The example shows that several rhetorical devices prepare the peak. Let us consider the details within the utterances, to start with the clause that precedes the peak. The performer separates the subject, the clitic personal pronoun, from the rest of the verb phrase and makes it an independent utterance to get full attention of the audience by building suspense. Notice that the caesura that splits the subject from the verb is very unusual in Fongbe. The peak has a serial verb construction (SVC) that consists of three verbs that express a movement downwards. Performers use a SVC in a story to indicate damage, catastrophe or death. SVC is the putting together of three or four movement verbs to express the peak. A lengthy pause follows the peak. The definite marker tracks the delicious sauce as the central participant.

The denouement

The denouement is the ultimate momentum that releases the central participant from the wicked actions of the culprit. The central participant shows his divine power in the denouement. The denouement is a moment of dramatic tension. The performer changes the prosody of the performance either by announcing a song, or by ‘breaking news’. The performer sometimes performs a song sung by the central participant to disclose the denouement (see 15). The song is followed by a long series of ‘breaking news’ utterances in 50 % of the stories. The ‘breaking news’ sequence starts with the denial by the culprit agent (B) in the form of a monologue. The victimized agent (A) angrily interrupts, and here, the pair of agents engages on a dialogue, which is the only dialogue of the story. The speech rate is fast and staccato. The effect of this part of the performance is close to the anchor that is breaking news in a television broadcast when a crisis is building up. The dialogue jumps from agent B to agent A, and is uninterrupted by pauses. However, the audience understands clearly, which of the two is speaking, for Fongbe has the logophoric pronoun **emi** (see 11.1).

Minor rhetorical phenomena: suspense

Performers also use a number of phenomena that create suspense. Suspense occurs in the flash forwards and cliff hangers that I described in the chapter about pauses (See 9.2.6.). The performers often insert a cliff hanger at the end of the paragraph. Some performers anticipate the denouement by inserting a flash forward. The performer delivers the majority of the flash forwards and the cliff hangers. It is remarkable that the audience also uses the minor devices in interaction (see 11.3.). The audience incidentally interrupts the performer by a flash forward, or, less frequently, by a cliff hanger.

11.3. The interaction with the audience

I described the interaction with the audience in the section on the performance (See 3.4.). In this section, I will describe the features of the interaction with the audience when it joins in the performance.

The interactions with the audience are diverse, the contributions being either reactive or proactive. The audience chimes in, asks questions but also sets the pace of the ongoing story. On the one hand, the language consultant is the organizer of the session, and amiably shows his pleasure. He often is the spokesperson who appreciatively comments, after the performer challenges him to do so, for example by producing a long pause after naming the agents at the start of the story.

On the other hand, the present colleague performers are ready to set the pace. They interrupt the performer by joyously repeating the last utterance, and by asking superfluous questions. They sometimes express their consternation at the events of the story, and they even take the lead by delivering a flash forward.

Hence, it appears that the interactions with the audience show two distinct paths, of which one is reactive, and the other one proactive. The reactive interruption emphasizes the lead of the performer by the approving remarks or the laughing of the audience. The proactive intervention drops a hint or gives a cue to encourage the performer. On the one hand, the reactive path is part of the performer's timing. The performer may challenge the audience with a long pause that provokes the audience to a reaction. On the other hand, the proactive path interferes with the performer's timing, for it promptly silences the performer. The digitized sound files show no registration of pauses at all at the moment of a proactive reaction, and points out a clear interruption of the performer. The reactive interruption triggers the audience, whilst the proactive intervention encourages the performer. The interruptions of the audience disturb the pattern of pauses, which is one of the major features of the mode of speaking of the performer.

The interaction shows that the mode of speaking of the audience widely differs from spontaneous human conversation (see p. 118). On the contrary, the way of speaking of the audience is a strictly organised participation. The analysis of the performance of the corpus shows that the studies that suggested that the analysis of conversation in European languages might be helpful to analyse verbal art, prove to be wrong (Reuster-Jahn 2005: 163).

I may also add that there is a cultural difference in the appreciation of silence. People in Western Europe and people in Benin have a different attitude towards silence. In Europe, people feel uneasy when a conversation falls silent. Let us consider analogous expressions in several European languages, such as the French ‘un ange passa’, and the Dutch ‘er ging een dominee voorbij’ meaning the English ‘there was a lull in the conversation’. Conversation means that one must talk to another and that it is even impolite to be silent. In Benin, this is not the case.

The way of speaking of the audience makes clear that the performer is in control of the performance, though it requires the interaction of the audience. The performer has a fit of laughter when delivering an utterance, which makes the audience to roar with laughter, for example at the peak of the story. The performer decides on the singing of a song, whereupon the audience may join the chorus. Some performers even kept an eye on the foreign guest, when they remarked ‘Did you write this down?’, and ‘the **yovó** is laughing!’.

