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12. Conclusions on the structuring of the discourse

I pay attention to the details in the oral production of the utterances when analysing the corpus, since the performance is a speech event. The details have to be a verbatim picture of the utterances of the performers. The main features that structure the discourse are the pattern of pauses, the multifunctional use of the particle *ś*, and the discourse features such as the use of verbs that move forward the story, the rhetorical phenomena and the way of speaking of the audience.

The performers of the corpus are audibly structuring the narrative discourse. The analysis of the digitized transcriptions shows that the performance is a speech event that consists of utterances and silences between the utterances. The main feature of the utterances is that they often are part of a clause, for the performers intentionally insert caesurae. The performers convey the story either by a single isolated utterance, or by a chunk of information in a set of utterances or even a paragraph. Utterances in the corpus consist of clauses or sentences, as well as noun phrases, clause introducers, conjunctions, adjuncts and comments by the performer.

Theoretically, there are three relevant parameters: the length of the utterance, the speech rate and the length of the pause following an utterance. The length of an utterance depends on the number of syllables within the utterance. The speech rate does not change during the performance. The length of the pauses is not dependent on the length of the utterance. The length of the pauses is not influenced by the speech rate either. Conclusively, the length of a pause does not depend on the length of the preceding utterance, neither on the speech rate. This implies that the length of a pause has a function of its own. Consequently, the length of the pause that follows an utterance is a phenomenon that can be studied in isolation. Within a story, the length of the pauses shows variations. The pattern of pauses builds up from short pauses to longer pauses within each paragraph. The pattern of pauses is consistent. The pattern of pauses tags the end of a paragraph with an extensive pause.

The data further show that the performers use also extensive pauses to highlight rhetorical phenomena. The peak of the story is followed by a long pause. The use of a flash forward or a cliff hanger involves also long pauses in all the stories of the corpus. In short, performers use pauses as content markers that highlight new information, such as a new paragraph or a rhetorical phenomenon that moves the story forward.

Performers use also short pauses that are up to 70% shorter than the pauses of the preceding utterances. These staccato utterances mark two phenomena: the 'breaking news' utterances of the denouement and the rare interior monologues of one of the agents. Here, the performer often switches to direct speech.

The structuring of the discourse by the pattern of pauses is comparable to the way punctuation indicates the structuring of a printed discourse. This also is an indication that the pauses in the performance are necessarily a tool to segment the discourse.

The definite particle *ǎ* is a multifunctional particle because it determines clauses as well as noun phrases. Performers use the clause-final particle *ǎ* to topicalize the preceding clause in a tail-head construction that indicates the beginning of a new paragraph. Here, the particle *ǎ* is used in conjunction with a long pause. The performers use the definite particle *ǎ* also to topicalize a preceding noun. This happens for example in a stand-alone utterance that marks one of the agents: ‘the other woman’. The next utterance starts with the personal pronoun that refers to the identical agent. Performers also use the particle *ǎ* to track and trace the central participant of the story throughout the story. The multifunctional use of the particle *ǎ* in the performance of Fongbe stories appears a meaningful increase of the syntactic and pragmatic functions compared to descriptions in previous analyses of Fongbe grammar.

The narrative discourse of the stories uses movement and non-movement verbs. The tail-head constructions and the use of movement and non-movement verbs within the paragraphs move the story forward. Temporal indicators as ‘the next morning’ or ‘in the evening’ also mark the advancing of the story. The performer uses direct speech to tell the successive actions and events. Performers relate the speech of the agents in indirect speech, which they express by SAY-verbs and logophoric pronouns. The central participant uses direct speech when singing a song to disclose the denouement.

The described pattern of rhetorical phenomena is consistent throughout the corpus. The performance shows that each story has one peak. Performers use flash forwards and cliff hangers to keep the audience in suspense. The accomplished performers use a flashback to introduce the central participant.

The performer is also free to insert songs in the performance. The central participant sings the song in direct speech. The statistical analysis shows that songs have only very short pauses. The definite particle does not occur in songs.

The interventions of the audience are part of the speech event. This consists of interventions that have nothing in common with West-European conversation. The objectives of the audience are dual: either the audience reacts on an issue in the narrative, or it proactively interacts with the performer. The performer may challenge the audience by a relatively long pause to respond and to express appreciation. The audience proactively interferes in the performer’s speech and disturbs the pattern of pauses.