

Chapter 2

Research Questions and Framework

2.1 Scope of This Present Research

There has been little work on Kam syntax and none on discourse study. Since this work is basically the first attempt in this area, as many aspects of Kam discourse will be covered as possible, including topics from phonological variation to the communication between the narrator and the audience/listeners. Needless to say, the main goal is still to discern the discourse patterns in Kam narratives within the selected framework detailed in Sect. 2.3.

After the introduction to the Kam people, Kam language, and culture in the Chaps. 1 and 2 will present the research questions that will be considered in this study, and identify the framework that this researcher will adopt. More specifically, after a brief summary of literature and related discourse analysis in the area, focus will shift to deliberate the discourse model Schiffrin (1987) proposes.

Chapter 3 will identify the source of the data used, the nature of the narrative data and the data-collecting process, including the equipment employed in field and the software used in processing data. An independent section delineates the geographical, anthropological, and social features of the data source village—Yutou. A brief summary of characters and events in the two narratives from two individual narrators is also presented. The full version of the narratives can be found in the text body here instead of an appendix, with the intention of facilitating the reading and referring actions.

Chapter 4 is the core of the research. It will discuss word order in discourse, and other phonological and syntactic variation found in data first. It will demonstrate that not only is word order more flexible in context, but also some phonological and syntactic processes are conditioned by constraints from higher level of linguistic structure. The goal is to observe how these linguistic variations at various levels can be interpreted within Schiffrin's model and determine how such variation fits into the adopted framework. The next section will examine sentence-final particles

(SFPs) and other discourse markers, including the semantic, syntactic, and discourse functions of SFPs. Special attention will be paid to the SFP inventory in discourse and the summary of observed individual SFP manifestation. The boundary between the discourse markers and SFPs will also be explored. Since there are multifunctional SFPs, it will be an ideal area to specify in discourse what plane(s) an individual SFP in context operates. This chapter will also consider the communication between narrator and listeners in detail and see how this narrative action is developed and conditioned by all the participants and surrounding factors.

Chapter 5 concludes the course of work of the present research, evaluating what has been achieved and how it may contribute to the further understanding of Kam narratives and discourse in general.

2.2 Literature Review

Kam–Tai scholars have conducted much work in studying Kam phonology (Liang 1984; Edmondson and Yang 1988; Zheng 1988; Dewen Wang 1988; Schack 2003) its dialectology (Guizhou Committee of Minority Languages 1959; Shi 1990; Long and Zheng 1998), some aspects of the syntax such as phrase structures (Shi 1986; Yang and Zhang 1993; Yang 1999), sentence patterns, and sociolinguistic issues (Long and Zheng 1996; Geary et al. 2003).

For many reasons, discourse structure of Kam has not yet been investigated. Not only is it rare to find a published paper on this topic, as also almost all the discourse data collected is not related to or intended for linguistic analysis. For example, even though many Kam folk stories have been published, they are to promote folklore or poetry study in general. Basically, what the scholars have done in the past is to record the narration first, either in a natural environment or inviting the narrator into a room to tell a story. Then it is translated from Kam narration into Chinese. Some scholars with linguistic training such as Yang Xi and Mingyao Long have transcribed the Kam orthography first and then make a one-to-one morpheme translation. A free translation then ensues. But many others have simply rendered the Kam utterance into Chinese directly. For example, all the stories in the *Selected Kam Folktales* Yang et al. (1982) were rendered into elegant Chinese. One of the results coming from this practice is that all the discourse features of the Kam are mostly lost during the process, as translators translate the sense not the syntax. Only the precise translator will attend to the structure of the discourse and how it has been created.

There are a few known published or unpublished works that can be used as example of naturally-generated spontaneous discourse: (a) *Sanjiang Kam Language* (Gongwan Xing et al. 1988). In the collection are thirty-six short recorded folk stories. They are all transcribed in IPA, followed with one-to-one gloss translation and free translation. This is the most extensive, recording of reliable discourse data available before the current study. (b) *A Brief Grammar of Kam* (Yang and Zhang

1993). Four stories are recorded in Kam orthography with one-to-one and free translation in text. (c) *Magazine of Kam Orthography* 侗文专刊. This is the sole magazine in Kam orthography published quarterly by the Sanjiang Minority Language Committee of Guangxi Province since 1980s. Articles are written in Kam only, with Chinese free translation sometimes. Thus there has been relatively little work to date involved in gathering authentic Kam material and no analysis of it.

The definition of discourse analysis can vary drastically, depending on what academic disciplines and academic traditions among researchers. The variation is so great that Tannen (1989, p. 6) concluded that “the name for the field ‘linguist discourse analysis’ ... says nothing more or other than the term ‘linguistic’: the study of language”. The analysis of Kam narrative will focus on studying the discourse structure both from the descriptive and analytical perspectives.

The Kam discourse structure remains much less well-studied in comparison to research that has gained an extensive understanding of phonology and aspects of the syntax. At the same time, available frameworks of general and practical analysis of other languages are abundant. It is undeniable that the studies of so many pioneers have inspired and shaped this author’s view, especially in regard to how actual instances of communication in the medium of language can be systematically examined. Yet there remains still the question which approach is suited to the problem at hand, since Kam discourse must treat both narrative and hortatory segments of discourse, at times with two speakers, one who interrupts the other, see Chap. 4. Works of several individuals and their respective theoretical approaches that have influenced this researcher will be reviewed in the following paragraphs.

Chu (1998), in his pioneering investigation of Mandarin Chinese discourse, lays out a systematic approach within functional frameworks. What he does is truly inspiring for the present study, especially his treatment of Chinese sentence-final particles (SFPs hereafter) and the concept of topic chain. “For those who share the same conviction as the author and myself that Chinese is a discourse-oriented language where grammatical phenomena will have to go beyond sentence-level for explanation, this book demonstrates an appropriate way of doing grammatical analysis in a language like Mandarin Chinese,” cf. Tsao (1979). To reveal the hidden functional patterns in a language with extremely limited of tense, aspect, and modality categories such as Chinese and Kam requires great creative effort to achieve. This paper intends to follow Chu’s approach, while related issues not studied by Chu will also be examined, such as word order and the communication scenario.

Law (1990) conducts a thorough study of Cantonese sentence-final particles in his dissertation *The Syntax and Phonology of Cantonese Sentence-Final Particles*. Even though his focus is more on the phonological and syntactic properties, his work does lead to not only a better understanding of Cantonese SFPs in words and sentences, but also to the speech act information they convey.

Person (2000), in his dissertation *Sentence-Final Particles in Bisu Narrative*, examined the factors influencing Bisu SFPs usage, including place in discourse, relative transitivity, sentence complexity, and occurrences in quotations. He concludes that “the primacy of text type in Bisu particle usage: those particles that seem abundant in folktale narratives occur

only rarely in the expository text and life stories. In addition, the point in the discourse at which point a sentence is used influences particle distribution. Certain particles are never used in the opening and closing portions of a story, while sentences in pre-peak episodes typically take many more particles than other points in the discourse.” All these features will contribute to the discussion of Kam SFPs in Chap. 3, cf. Longacre (1996) for a discussion of peak.

Toolan (2001) critical work concerns specifically the language-oriented or linguistically-minded perspectives on narrative and narratology. However there are few ways of looking at narrative that attend systematically to the language of stories and models of narrative-analysis with focus on the linguistic form of narratives or the linguistically-descriptive structure. Toolan’s approach is useful in the study of the communication between the narrator and the hearers in Kam narrative, which is the concern of Chap. 4. Abbot’s (2002) analysis of the question of narration, and particularly the role of the narrator, is central in the analysis of Kam narrative.

Discourse analysis, as an academic discipline, has been gaining more attention in the past decade. So many scholars have done extraordinary studies in their areas of expertise. This paper will also refer to Schiffrin’s research in discourse markers.

2.3 Schiffrin’s Five-Plane Discourse Model

In her then famous research on discourse marker, Schiffrin (1987, pp. 21–29) proposes a five-plane model of coherence in talk and a model of discourse in general, as illustrated in Fig. 2.1.

The EXCHANGE STRUCTURE and ACTION STRUCTURE are non-linguistic structures, while the remaining three structures, IDEATIONAL STRUCTURE, PARTICIPATION STRUCTURE, and INFORMATION STRUCTURE, are

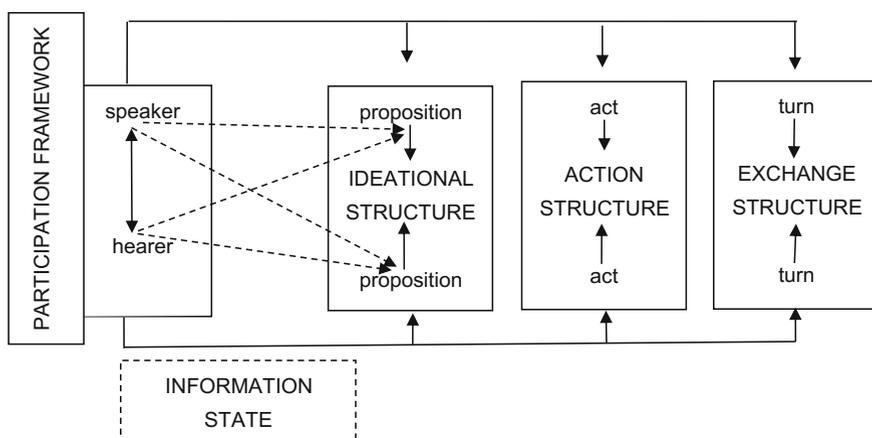


Fig. 2.1 Schiffrin’s Discourse model

semantic. The top part of each structure is from the participant initiating the conversation and the bottom part is from the following speaker. More specifically: EXCHANGE STRUCTURE reflects the mechanics of the conversational interchange such as contact signals, turnover signals, and rekeying signals, and shows the results of the participant turn-taking and how these alternations are related to each other. ACTION STRUCTURE concerns the sequential, linear order of speech in the context of a discourse. Actions occur not randomly but are patterned and predictable, thus are interpreted as situated. IDEATIONAL STRUCTURE represents different relations between propositions of the overall configuration of idea structure: cohesive, topic, and functional relations. EXCHANGE STRUCTURES emerge only in dialogue, and ACTION STRUCTURE can emerge in either dialogue or monologue. In contrast, IDEATIONAL STRUCTURES are clearly found in both genres. PARTICIPATION FRAMEWORK denotes the ways in which the speakers and hearers relate to one another as well as orientation toward utterances they produce. INFORMATION STRUCTURE involves the organization and management of knowledge and meta-knowledge as it evolves over the course of discourse, a structure deals with the cognitive capacities of speakers/hearers. For example, what a speaker knows and what a hearer knows; what speaker and hearers know about their respective knowledge; and what parts of each knowledge base one knows the other share. In a word, INFORMATION STRUCTURES are dynamic interactive processes changing as their contributing factors develop during the course.

Observed discourse and other linguistic features will be examined within Schiffrin's model illustrated above.

2.4 Summary

In this chapter, research scope has been deliberated. A literature of related studies in discourse analysis follows, but the spotlight shines on the Schiffrin's five-plane model, which will serve as to help the discussion in the coming analysis.

The next chapter will describe the source and nature of the data, including a detailed introduction of Yutou Kam community. The full version of the two collected narratives is placed as part of a body of text respectively to facilitate reading and referring of data samples through discussion.



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