

Chapter 7

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the relationship between macrostructure (global thematic prominence) and storyline (structural thematic prominence) in five Solu Sherpa conversational oral stories of personal experience to determine if the storyline of each text is the main type of information from which macrostructural summaries are constructed.

In this chapter, the conclusions are summarized, some implications of these conclusions are discussed, the methodology is evaluated, and some suggestions for further research are considered.

7.1 Summary of Conclusions

The first chapter introduced the topic under investigation in this thesis as the relationship between two aspects of thematic prominence (storyline and macrostructure) in the Solu Sherpa language of Nepal. Background information on the Sherpa people and language was provided, the general research methodology was outlined, the scope of the study was discussed, and the expected benefits were described.

In chapter two, the research on Sherpa phonology, grammar, and discourse was summarized. In addition, relevant research on the discourse structure of languages closely related to Sherpa was described.

The third chapter reviewed the scholarly literature relevant to the present study and then described the ways in which this literature would be applied to the analysis of the Sherpa texts. An original methodology for describing discourse type and genre was proposed, which was an adaptation and integration of Longacre (1996) and Burridge (2004). In addition, earlier formulations of macrostructure theory that have often been applied in textlinguistics research were rejected in favor of a methodology for macroanalysis adapted from van Dijk and Kintsch's (1983) cognitive approach to macrostructure.

Chapter four introduced the five discourses under analysis by summarizing each text and classifying each discourse according to its universal type, which is *narrative story*, and its genre, *conversational oral stories of personal experience*.

Next the macrosegmentation was described. It was found that at least three devices were necessary to indicate a boundary between thematic paragraphs, and it was necessary for at least one of these devices to be a break in one of Givón's (1984) four unities.

Then the analysis of the narrative superstructure revealed that each story had at least one peak (with one story having two peaks). Three of the six peaks encoded the climax, with two encoding the inciting moment, and one encoding the developing conflict. Five of Longacre's (1996) six peak marking devices were used in the Sherpa texts. Change of pace was used to mark five of the six peaks. A concentration of participants, the occurrence of particles, onomatopoeia, and other phonetic devices, and heightened vividness were employed in four of the

six peaks. Rhetorical underlining appeared in just one peak. A change in vantage point and/or orientation was not found in the Sherpa texts.

In chapter five, nine clausal information types were identified, including a storyline Band and eight supportive Bands: 1. Flashback A, 2. Background actions, 3. Flashback B, 4. Background activities, 5. Setting, 6. Irrealis, 7. Evaluation, and 8. Cohesion. The storyline clauses were marked in six different ways. Two stories employed five patterns, two stories utilized four patterns, and one story used three of the six patterns.

Finally, the results of the macroanalysis were reported in chapter six. The analysis was exemplified in detail with one story. Then the second-level macropropositions of each text were compared to the superstructure and analyzed to determine what types of clausal information were utilized in their construction. This was done to answer the research question: *What types of clausal information are employed in the construction of the macrostructural summaries of the Sherpa texts and how often is each type employed?*

It was found that clauses from all nine information types were employed at least once in the construction of second-level macropropositions in the Sherpa texts.

The storyline type was the most employed (38% of the information units) but supportive material overall was used more than storyline material for constructing macropropositions (62% to 38%). The most used supportive Band was background action, accounting for 13% of the information units, and Irrealis material was the origin of 12%. The least utilized information types were evaluation and cohesive material, each with a frequency of 2%.

Furthermore, it was observed that the second-level macropropositions tended to summarize discourse segments with high level notional functions such as *exposition*, *increasing tension* (which includes the inciting moment and/or developing tension and/or climax), *height of tension* (which includes the climax and sometimes elements of increasing tension and/or falling tension), *falling tension* (which includes the denouement and/or final suspense), and *end of tension* (which includes the conclusion).

7.2 Application of Conclusions

The analysis of clausal information types conducted in this thesis suggests a modification of the storyline marking scheme posited by Schöttelndreyer (1978). While Schöttelndreyer (1978) suggested that each sub-genre of narrative was characterized by one or two storyline marking devices, the results of the present study indicate that a Sherpa storyteller can use between three and five storyline marking patterns in a single oral conversational story of personal experience.

In addition, the results of this study indicate that storyline marking should not be an important indicator of narrative sub-genre, rather, stories sharing a bundle of generic features can employ storyline patterns in different ways. Therefore, it seems that storytellers utilize storyline patterns depending on the source of their information and their attitude towards the information, not based primarily on the narrative sub-genre.

Regarding the relationship between storyline and macrostructural summaries, it seems that Longacre (1989a:415, 444) is claiming that the macrostructure of a narrative can be built primarily from the storyline. However, this study shows

that although the storyline is the most utilized information type for constructing second-level macropropositions of the Sherpa texts, supportive material is employed more often than storyline material. This result suggests that there are some narrative genres in some languages in which supportive information has at least as much global thematic prominence as storyline information, even while the storyline continues to represent the structural thematic prominence.

Furthermore, the results of this study argue for a broader approach to the macroanalysis of Solu Sherpa stories of personal experience that would include the use of storyline and supportive material. That is, the relationship between macrostructure and clausal information types reported in this study seems to suggest that a macroanalysis based on storyline alone as input would not accurately summarize the global semantic content of a Solu Sherpa conversational oral story of personal experience. Rather, this study estimates that a macroanalysis that did not include clauses with supportive material would leave out a large portion of the content needed to form an accurate second-level macrostructural summary.

In support of van Dijk (1977b:147), this study indicates that action and event descriptions are more important than state descriptions in the macrostructure of a narrative. Storyline information was the most used information type in the construction of second-level macropropositions and eventive clauses types as a whole were the origin of 74% of the macrostructural information units.

This study also seems to moderately support Longacre's statement that setting material is "somewhat" important to narrative macrostructures, since setting

material was the third-most used supportive Band in the construction of second-level macropropositions.

The relationship observed between macrostructure, surface structure, and notional structure seems to support the claim of van Dijk (1976 and 1985) and van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) that narrative superstructure puts constraints on global semantic structure. In this case, macrostructure tended to correspond more with the notional aspects than the surface aspects of the superstructure.

It was observed that second-level macropropositions corresponded with high level notional functions. These high level notional functions were often filled by segments of text that included a combination of storyline and supportive material. As a result, it seems that supportive material was interpreted as macrorelevant (and thus used to construct macropropositions) when it was needed to adequately fill superstructural categories which would not be filled by storyline clauses alone.

Therefore, another implication of this study seems to be that in deciding on a methodology for analyzing narrative macrostructure, one must first evaluate the relationship between clausal information types (also called salience analysis or grounding) and narrative superstructure (i.e. notional structure and surface structure). If each segment of text with a high level notional function can be adequately summarized with storyline clauses alone, then an adequate summary can probably be constructed of the global (textual) semantic structure based on the storyline alone as the input for a macrostructure analysis (following Somsonge 1991). However, if the segments of the text with high level notional

functions can not be adequately summarized without including information encoded in supportive material, then for that text, only a macroanalysis of all the clauses, and not just the storyline, would result in an adequate summary. It seems that the greater the role that the supportive material has in fulfilling notional functions, the more information one would lose by creating a macrostructure based on storyline alone.

The result that only 2% (2 of 94) of information units originate in cohesive clauses seems to indicate that high level macrostructural summaries are constructed primarily from new propositions⁹⁴. In fact, even in the two uses of cohesive material, old propositional information was not employed in the construction of macropropositions. For the one macroproposition of BEAR that employed a cohesive clause in its construction, only the macrorelevant subject from the cohesive clause was employed in the macroproposition. Thus, the old clausal information was not actually employed in the construction of the macroproposition. The other macrorelevant cohesive clause was in the first sentence of SICK and seems to link the story to information that the storyteller probably presented to the audience in the time between the researcher's request for a story and the beginning of the recorded story, namely that the story is about a time when the storyteller went trekking. For the conversation as a whole, this clause would not be macrorelevant, but in the story proper it is new information that introduces the situational setting of trekking.

⁹⁴ According to Longacre's (1996) textlinguistics approach to storyline, clauses repeating a state or a change of state (i.e. old clausal information) are demoted to the cohesive Band.

Therefore, all the second-level macropropositions in this thesis are constructed from propositions that are new within the story proper. However, macrorelevant props and participants can come from propositions that communicate old non-macrorelevant information. Future research is needed on the role of old and new props and participants in the marking of discourse prominence.

7.3 Evaluation of Methodology

In the literature review, van Dijk and Kintsch's (1983) cognitive model of macrostructures was outlined. According to this approach, macropropositions are constructed not only based on the application of macrorules but also by means of an evaluation of macrorelevance based on direct surface indicators of macrorelevance (i.e. thematic expression) and cumulative (i.e. indirect) surface indicators of macrorelevance. The application of this framework which included an analysis of surface markers in addition to the inherently subjective application of macrorules seemed to provide a method by which macropropositions could be constructed more objectively and more in line with the intentions of the storytellers. However, not all storytellers have a specific set of propositions in mind, which they hope to clearly communicate to the audience. Rather, some storytellers do not disambiguate their intentions with direct and cumulative indicators of macrorelevance. Stories with intentionally ambiguous messages will therefore be more difficult to analyze by applying this method than stories in which the teller desires to narrow the range of possible interpretations with surface signals of macrorelevance.

In addition, the application of macrostructure theory in this study was limited by the fact that the present researcher has a limited knowledge of Sherpa and is a cultural outsider. The cognitive theory of macrostructures attempts to model the comprehension strategies of communication in natural settings. However, since the present researcher is a cultural outsider and a non-native speaker of Sherpa, this study does not accurately model the cognitive processes of a native speaker, but rather the researcher's outsider-based understanding of the texts. The modeling of comprehension by means of macrostructure analysis would be much more accurate if done by a native speaker of the language and culture under investigation. This is especially true for the application of macrorules, which is inherently subjective and assumes that each reader/listener of a text would apply comprehension strategies differently based on their own communication goals. However, it seems that the analysis of direct and cumulative surface indicators of macrorelevance (i.e. macrocues), a structural approach with a cognitive foundation, would be a fruitful task for researchers studying a language and culture that is not their own.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

This study has re-examined the marking of storyline in Sherpa personal experience stories. While Schöttelndreyer (1978) seemed to indicate that each information type only had one or two marking strategies, the present study has found that a multitude of strategies are employed to mark each type of information. As a result, more studies are needed on different kinds of narratives to determine if storyline marking should be used as an indicator of narrative sub-

genre or if the use of different storyline marking patterns is determined by factors other than generic identity, as this thesis suggests.

Another result of this thesis that suggests further research in the skewing relationship found between climax and peak. The climax was encoded by a peak in 3 of the 5 stories. The two stories in which this did not happen were told by the same storyteller, and in both cases, the climax was encoded with a postpeak episode rather than the peak. More research is needed to determine if these patterns are due to individual style or they are more widely observable among Solu Sherpa storytellers.

Kelly (2004) has suggested that it is difficult to distinguish between the narrative linking function of converbs and the adverbial function. The present researcher has also found this to be a difficult distinction to make. More research is needed to determine the ways in which native speakers do or do not distinguish between these two uses of the Sherpa converb suffix, and what implications there might be for the marking of prominence.

A fourth possible avenue for further research is the analysis of the form and function of non-past and past stems in Sherpa, particularly in relation to tense and aspect. Phonological verb classes have been described by Kelly (2004:242), but it seems that no one has yet studied the ways in which past and non-past stems are used to indicate tense and aspect along with verbal morphology.

The role of emphatic particles in signaling different kinds of prominence in Sherpa also needs more research. Schöttelndreyer (1975:45-47) has briefly described the way in which some emphatic particles are used. However, some

emphatic particles used in the Sherpa texts studied in this thesis have not been mentioned in the literature. These include *mar'* and *pe*.

Another study on the relationship between types of prominence might include research on the relationship between peak, which is viewed as a function of the surface structure, and global thematic prominence (i.e. macrostructure). This study would be particularly interesting since Polanyi (1989:25) discusses Longacre's (1976) concept of peak as a concentration of highly evaluated information. Polanyi's concept of evaluation, however, is related to semantic prominence, while Longacre's idea of peak functions on the surface level and can be mapped onto the notional structure in a number of ways.

In addition, a fruitful study would be to compare the summary creation methods of Polanyi (1989) and van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) by applying them both to the same set of discourses. While Polanyi's approach is primarily structural, but does not take into account paragraph structure or superstructure, van Dijk and Kintsch's (1983) approach has cognitive assumptions and also takes into account surface structure signals. These two methods of studying prominence and summary creation could also be compared with the Hopper's (1995) application of the concept of MAVEs (Multiply Articulated Verbal Expressions) to study the marking of prominent events.

A final suggestion would be for more studies that evaluate the relationship between macrostructure and mainline in different languages, discourse types, and genres. It seems likely that this relationship would vary depending on the rhetorical goal(s) of the producer and the interpretive goals of the audience.