

## TAIL-HEAD LINKAGE IN SIROI

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

Tail-Head Linkage<sup>1</sup> occurs in various forms in most Papuan languages<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to show how speakers of the Siroi language<sup>3</sup> use this feature in narrative discourse.

Section 2 will discuss clause-chaining in Siroi, since that needs to be understood in order to explain the use of Tail-Head Linkage. Section 3 will show the different forms of Tail-Head Linkage as they occur in Siroi narrative. Section 4 will explain when Tail-Head Linkage occurs most frequently and, finally, section 5 will explain when Tail-Head Linkage is *not* used.

Although many stories have been studied, examples are taken mainly from three stories which are typical of Siroi narrative and which have been studied in detail with consultant help from S.I.L. linguist Kathleen Callow, at a workshop in England in 1987. Charts have been made of these stories and these have been very helpful in discovering when Tail-Head Linkage is used, and probably even more so in discovering when it is omitted.

### 2 CLAUSE-CHAINING IN SIROI

Siroi is a clause-chaining language and the chains of clauses quite often consist of single verbs.

When the same subject follows, the verbs within the chain usually have a dependent verb-ending (*-a* or *-mba*<sup>4</sup>), while the verb that expresses the main event always comes at the end and is fully inflected as in (1).

- (1) *Nu sarka bagat kilmba ngur-ngurmba kilmba*  
 She digging yams taking break:breaking taking

*patika mang sarka tangamba minna.*  
 putting again digging doing:thus was.

‘She was digging, taking the wild yams (which she found), cutting them in small pieces and putting them aside and then started digging again.’

Sometimes within these kinds of chains a verb which needs to be highlighted may be fully inflected even though the same subject follows. In that case the same subject marker *sulumba*<sup>5</sup> is used as in (2).

- (2) *Baringina sulumba pasa ngaigonu Yamai le Mumai sanikina.*  
 Fell and talk bad Yamai and Mumai said:to:them.  
 ‘She fell and scolded Yamai and Mumai.’

In this case the former verb (‘fall’) is highlighted, probably because it is the reason for scolding the two girls who pushed her. Apparently in cases like this, with verbs that express major events, a dependent verb-ending does not sufficiently highlight the verb and a full verb-ending plus *sulumba* is used when the narrator does not want to finish his sentence at that particular point.

When a different subject follows, the verbs within the clause are fully inflected and the different subject marker *le* follows, as in (3). These verbs are always highlighted.

- (3) *Pitainaig le baringina.*  
 Pushed:her and fell.  
 ‘They pushed her and she fell.’

Notice that the verb that comes at the end is always fully inflected, regardless of whether the subject of the next clause is the same or different.

### 3 DIFFERENT FORMS OF TAIL-HEAD LINKAGE

Generally speaking Tail-Head Linkage, which occurs at the beginning of sentences, consists of recapitulation of the final clause of the previous sentence. Usually this means recapitulation of the *final verb* of the previous sentence, i.e. the main event is highlighted by means of recapitulation.

So far the following forms of Tail-Head Linkage have been found to occur.

#### 3.1 Recapitulation of verb + independent suffix

This may be a simple recapitulation of the final verb of the previous sentence as in (4). This can be considered to be the simple, basic form.

- (4) *Mbain brokmbi ndekina. Ndekina le...*  
 Floor hole:through fell. Fell and...  
 'It fell through a hole in the floor. It fell and ...'

However, very often it is a more complex recapitulation, for instance with a series of two or more verbs as in (5) or a combination of one or more verbs plus optional subject, as in (6), or one or more verbs plus optional object as in (7).

- (5) *Nale tange kinymba minnaik. Kinymba minnaik le...*  
 They there sleeping were. Sleeping were and..  
 'They were sleeping there. They were sleeping and ...'
- (6) *Ki kumba butungam bafuna. Ki butungam bafuna le...*  
 Sun going go:down almost:did. Sun go.down almost:did and..  
 'The sun had almost gone down. The sun had almost gone down and...'
- (7) *Ki tumba lok talkina. Lok talkina le...*  
 key taking lock opened. Lock opened and..  
 'He took the key and opened the lock. He opened the lock and...'

Besides these combinations of verb + subject and verb + object the verb may also be recapitulated together with postpositional and goal phrases as in (8).

- (8) *Nu tumbrang kina. Tumbrang kina sulumba...*  
 He village went. Village went and..  
 'He went to the village. He went to the village and then...'

Note that in all these cases either the different subject marker *le* or the same subject marker *sulumba* follows to signal whether the next subject is the same or a different one.

### 3.2 Recapitulation of verb + dependent suffix

As in 3.1 this may be a simple recapitulation of the verb as in (9) or it may be a more complex recapitulation of any of the combinations mentioned above as in (10).

- (9) *ki kirena. Kiremba tina sulumba...*  
 key touched. Touching took and...  
 ‘... he touched the key. Touching it he took it and...’

- (10) *age ande tumba kina. Age ta tumba kumba ka...*  
 dog a taking went. Dog that taking going go...  
 ‘... he went, taking a dog with him. He went, taking the dog...’

Note that in these cases there is no change in grammatical subject following.

### 3.3 Using a form of the pro-verb ‘tanga-’

When the pro-verb *tanga-* (‘do thus’) is used to summarize the final clause of the preceding sentence<sup>6</sup>, it either has a dependent verb ending, in which case the next clause has the same grammatical subject, as in (11), or it has an independent verb ending, in which case either *le* or *sulumba* follow to show whether the next subject is different or the same, as in (12).

- (11) *Piro mbolnge ngukina. Tangamba nu kinyina.*  
 Garden in planted. Doing:thus she slept.  
 ‘She planted it in the garden. After having done this, she slept.’

- (12) *Makena le kumna. Tangana le...*  
 Bit and died. Thus:it:did and...  
 ‘(The snake) bit (the dog) and it died. It had done so, and (the snake)...’

### 3.4 Using a different verb for the same event

Occasionally I have found Tail-Head Linkage constructions where the second sentence began with a verb that is different from the final verb of the preceding sentence, but still refers to the same event.

So for instance the final verb of the first sentence might be ‘come’ and then the next sentence may start off with the verb ‘arrive’ as in (13).

- (13) *Mam ndeka ina nane wikina le ndekinaig. Nane promba...*  
 Father then mother they called and came:down. They arriving...  
 ‘Then father called mother and the others and they came down.  
 They arrived and...’

Also a series of events may be summarized by using a form of the pro-verb *tanga-* (‘do thus’) and *minam* (‘remain’), followed by either *le* or *sulumba* as in (14).

- (14) *pasa ngaigonu Yamai le Mumai sanikina.*  
 talk bad Yamai and Mumai said:to:them.

*Nane tangamba minnaig le...*  
 They doing:thus were and...

‘She was scolding Yamai and Mumai. They were doing thus and...’

### 3.5 Recapitulation of non-verbs

Very occasionally something other than a verb is recapitulated. This may be a locative phrase, but also other phrases like in (15) where it seems that the focus in the Tail-Head Linkage is the fact that the key was not found and *kuga* (‘no’) is reduplicated.

- (15) *kangeranu ta ki kugatok. Tangamba kuga le...*  
 looked but key without. Doing:thus no and...  
 ‘... he was searching but saw no key. Doing thus and (seeing)  
 no (key)...’

## 4 WHEN DOES TAIL-HEAD LINKAGE OCCUR?

Tail-Head Linkage most frequently occurs *within* the thematic paragraph<sup>7</sup> rather than across paragraph boundaries. When it *does* occur at the beginning of a new thematic paragraph, usually a form of the verb *minam* (‘be’) or *kambim* (‘go’)

is used to denote a change of time or a change of location. A common example would be (16) where *minnaig* ('they were') is recapitulated at the beginning of a new paragraph to introduce a new participant.

- (16) *Tangamba minnaig le...*  
 Doing:thus were and...  
 'Thus they were doing and...'

Tail-Head Linkage occurs mainly in narrative type discourse in the time-chain of the story where it highlights the main events, i.e. the final verbs of the sentences. These are the verbs that are recapitulated in the next passages.

Example (17) is typical of this kind of construction.

- (17) *Ngukina sulumba pastinga bagat ta kilmba sigrikumba age*  
 Buried and standing yams those taking put:in:stringbag dog  
  
*ande ta tumba kina. Age ta tumba kumba ka...*  
 a that taking went. Dog that taking going go...

'After she had burried the dog, she stood up, took the wild yams, put them in her stringbag, took the other dog and went. Taking that dog she went...'

Generally speaking then, all the main events of the story are focussed on by means of recapitulation. This is done very consistently by most narrators throughout the whole narrative with the exception of the climax of the story when usually there is a lot of direct speech and the information flow is extremely high. When that is the case, Tail-Head Linkage is sometimes not used lest it would stop the flow of events.

In a story about a family who are working in the garden and run into two snakes and then flee in panic, nine clauses (i.e. nine verbs each expressing an event) are used without any of them recapitulated. And it is very rare in narrative discourse to find so many clauses occurring in sequence not linked by Tail-Head Linkage.

It is important to note that Siroi apparently uses Tail-Head Linkage in a different way from some other languages. Speece, for instance, states that Angave uses Tail-Head Linkage *particularly* in the climax of the story.

Callow (1974: 77) says that ‘while many languages use repetition for linkage, different verbs or clauses will be repeated in different languages, with differing significance. *Care must be taken to use repetition at the right points.*’ (italics mine).

## 5 WHEN DOES TAIL-HEAD LINKAGE *NOT* OCCUR?

As stated above, in Siroi Tail-Head Linkage occurs most frequently in the time-chain of the narrative where it signals the most important events. In fact, by just glancing over the recapitulated clauses of a story you can usually get an accurate impression of the story-line.

It follows from what’s been said above that when Tail-Head Linkage is *not* used in the time-chain of the story, something other than the next main event is in focus. This is usually either an event that stands *outside* the time-chain, as in 5.1 and 5.2 below, or it may be a case of *variation* in the time-chain, as in 5.3 through 5.5.

So far I have not found Tail-Head Linkage used in the following cases.

### 5.1 In the setting of the story

Although some stories hardly have any setting and the time-chain begins in the first paragraph, many stories do have a setting and in the setting Tail-Head Linkage is consistently *not* used.

It is not uncommon to have more than ten clauses in the setting of the story before any reduplication of clauses occurs.

### 5.2 In the summary of the story

This may be a moral or an outcome which, as the setting, stands outside the time-chain and no Tail-Head Linkage is used.

A typical example is (18) which is part a story about a snake killing two dogs.

- (18) ‘Well, then the story became well-known and in my village all the people heard about it. This story is the story of a woman from Bibi [village]. It is the story of the snake that killed two dogs. It is a true story. That is all.’

### 5.3 With the introduction of new participants

New participants are usually introduced with *ande* ('a'). In the next sentence the new participant is then referred to by using *ta* (the deictic article 'that') and no Tail-Head Linkage is used.

Although this normally occurs in the setting of the story, as might be expected, it may also occur further on in the story. This is a case of time stand-still, or it could be seen as embedded setting, and no Tail-Head Linkage is used.

### 5.4 With time-lapse

When there is a lapse of time, Tail-Head Linkage is normally not used. Frequently this signals the start of the next semantic unit. Common phrases that have been found to occur are: 'The next day...' 'Years went by and...' 'Later...' 'When he had grown up...', etc.

### 5.5 With time stand-still

This may be a relation as orientor-comment as in (19).

- (19) *Nu ndek wamdus ande ngayonu ande nu mbol prona.*  
 He then idea a bad a him on arrived.

*Nu idusna: Pato te balemba...*  
 He thought: Duck this killing...

'Then he had a bad idea. He thought: I will kill this duck and...'

It may also be a relation of contraction-amplification as in (20).

- (20) 'There were two snakes there. The big snake would swallow some water and the small snake would move further on and slowly go into the stomach of the big snake.'

Other examples include generic-specific, and contrast (negative-positive).



## 6 CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be said that Tail-Head Linkage is used throughout Siroi narrative to signal the main events of the story and it follows the time-chain very closely. It is not used with events that stand outside the time-chain.

Although Tail-Head Linkage is a common feature of Papuan languages, its use differs from language to language as should be clear from what has been said in section 4.

## NOTES

1. Other terms that have been used are *Head-Tail Linkage* or simply *Linkage*. See e.g. Grimes (1975: 316) which refers to Thurman's article on Chuave Medial Verbs.
2. Tail-Head Linkage does not just occur in Papuan languages. Callow (1974: 76) mentions Kayapo (Brazil) which 'provides an interesting example of large-scale repetition. At the end of an episode a transition paragraph occurs consisting entirely of repetitive material, acting as an introduction to the next episode.' She goes on to say that many languages use a similar device.
3. Siroi is a Non-Austronesian Trans-New Guinean Phylum language of the Madang-Adelbert Range Sub-Phylum. Siroi belongs to the Madang Super-Stock, which is composed of two stocks. Of these two stocks, Siroi belongs to the Rai Coast Stock and is a member of the Kabenau family (Z'Graggen 1975). A grammar of the Siroi language has been published (Wells 1975).
4. I analyze *-a* as the basic morpheme and *-mba* as consisting of two morphemes, i.e. the stem of the verb 'ascend' (*mb-*) and the dependent verb-ending *a-*. This was suggested by Reesink (1981) and discussed in some detail in Van Kleeft (1988).
5. Notice that *sulumba* ends with the suffix *-mba* marking same subject. Also, *sulu-* is the stem of the verb 'to finish' although in *sulumba* it functions as the same subject marker and it has lost its primary meaning. However, the verb is still used in its primary meaning, too.
6. Linguistic analysis has not revealed yet when speakers of the language use the proverb *tanga-* ('do-thus') to summarize an event, rather than simply repeating the verb that expresses that event. However, it seems that constructions with

*tanga-* are more closely connected than constructions where the final verb is repeated.

7. I define a thematic paragraph in Siroi as a semantic unit of discourse consisting of one or more sentences. Thematic paragraphs are marked by a major change in place, time and/or participants or sometimes by a change from foreground to background. Lexical items are frequently used to start new paragraphs, e.g. *kile* ('now') and *ariya* ('alright').

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