An analysis of topics in Prinmi: in cross-linguistic perspective

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http://web.hku.hk/~picus/handouts/Prinmi_topics.pdf

Topic prominence in Far East

孔雀呢, 尾巴长; 大象呢, 鼻子长。
孔雀尾，尾巴长；大象呢，鼻子长。

クジャクは羽が大きい、ゾウは鼻が長い。

Background of the present study

- Subproject of the Typology of Information Structure undertaken in the Institute for Linguistics at University of Potsdam
- Standard methodology developed by the project was used in data elicitation
- Elicitation was based on visual prompts such as series of pictures, video clips, and language games, etc.
- Data of Prinmi were collected mostly in 2005

To informants:
Make a short statement, what is going on in the highlighted scene, in order that your partner will identify it. Please do not mention the picture, just give a short description of the highlighted scene, so that it is clearly identified from the others. Before you make your description, look very carefully about the differences among the pictures, so that your description effectively identifies the relevant picture.

To informant 1:
You listen carefully to your partner. After he finishes his description, please point at the scene which you suppose, that is the highlighted one.
Introduction

- Prinmi is a Tibeto-Burman language of China, a core member of the Qiangic branch;
- Speakers in (northwestern) Yunnan are officially identified as Pûmî 普米族 and in southwestern Sichuan as Zàng 藏族;
- There is no writing tradition nor approved script;
- There are many dialects, with a total number of speakers around 40,000.

### Types of topic (1)

**Aboutness Topic**

| Dev qii ggi dia gganf ggia waiqeev deav-chai=sí this dog Top now bed Attr leftside up-stand-Pit |
| 'This dog it has now stood on the leftside of the bed.' |

**Frame-setting Topic**

| Bbo hmezha ggi nef nia jjjji dov kie bbo Dsc young-woman Top 3.s Dsc book read time Frs naggiff mevranf gge-gqionf. again ring out-appear |
| 'When the young woman she read the book, the ring was on again.' |

**Implicational Aboutness Topic**

| Eav bbo maaal mamsiyv bbo, ……… |
| 'As for me (unlike others), I know the way, ………' |

**After-thought Topic**

… refa a dev siqboqon kon ca-qau=sí, dev mif ggi front=Attr this tree on m-knock=Pit this person Top '… knocked (himself) on the tree in front of (him), this man.'

### Types of topic (2)

| Explicit Referent | Contrastive AbT | Contrastive FsT |
| Implicit Referent | Implicational AbT | Implicational FsT |

**Contrastive Aboutness Topic**

|PEATFNI bbo re pien, qii bbo zhcefig iefgif=fí ro. young man Ctr front flee dog Ctr after chase-Impf |
| 'The young man, he is fleeing in the front; the dog, it is chasing behind him.' |

**Contrastive Frame-setting Topic**

| Waiqeev bblie bbo jinav di ddonf. leftside Dat Frs house one exist.man sshiuev bblie bbo qii di xexef. rightside Dat Frs dog one exist.an |
| 'On the left there is a house; on the right there is a dog.' |

### Types of topic and topic marking in Prinmi

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<tr>
<th>Function</th>
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<th>ggi</th>
<th>bbo</th>
<th>ggi bbo</th>
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<th>Contrast; Frame-setting</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
The information structure of topic construction

Complexity of the topic-comment construction (1)

Contrastive topic-comment construction

Topic1-Comment1, + Topic2-Comment2 (+ ... + Topicn-Commentn)

The young man is eating pears, the young woman is eating bananas.

Complexity of the topic-comment construction (2)

Chained comment construction

Topic + Comment1, + Comment2, (+ ... + Commentn)

The young man has hidden the hoes; the young woman has hidden the bicycle.

Complexity of the topic-comment construction (3)

Recursive topic-comment construction

Hanging Topic1 + Comment1

The young man is smoking a cigarette; the young woman is drinking soju.

Summary—Topic prominence in Prinmi

• Aboutness topic and frame-setting topic represent the basic type of topic and are usually marked by different clitics;
• Pragmatically, topic can be further divided into contrastive topic and implicational topic;
• Semanto-syntactically, after-thought topic and hanging topic are two special topics;
• Generally there is no one-to-one relation between the type of topic and topic marking;
• The Topic-Comment Construction is extremely common;
• Information structure starts with the frame-setting topic (optional) and the aboutness topic, followed by a comment;
• The number of topic and/or comment can be increased through coordination, clause-chaining, and topic-comment embedding.

Selected References