The 23rd Annual Meeting of the Southeast Asian Linguistics Society

May 29-31, 2013   Chulalongkorn University

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

Picus S. Ding
University of Hong Kong
http://web.hku.hk/~picus/handouts/Prinmi_topics.pdf

Topic prominence in Southeast Asia

ภาษาอังกฤษเนี่ย วันวันหนึ่ง ใช้บ่อยแค่ไหนฮะ

phasǎa aŋkrĭt nîa ¦ wan wan nɯŋ ¦ cháy bɔ̀ɔy khêɛ-nǎy há
language English PP ¦ day day one ¦ use often how.much SLP
'The English language, how often do you use it in a day?'

» ช้างงวงยาว   (Iwasaki & Ingkaphirom 2005)

[[cháaŋ] [ŋuaŋ yaaw]]
  elephant   trunk long
'The elephant – its trunk is long.

孔雀呢, 尾巴长; 大象呢, 鼻子长。(Spoken)
孔雀尾巴长, 大象鼻子长。   (Written)
'The peacock has a long tail and the elephant has a long nose.'

Topic prominence in Far East

孔雀呢,   尾巴长;   大象呢,   鼻子长。
kongque ne   weiba chang daxiang ne   bizi chang
peacock TOPIC tail   long   elephant TOPIC nose long
'The peacock has a long tail and the elephant has a long nose.'

クジャクは 羽が大きい、ゾウは   鼻が長い。
kujaku wa hane   ga ōki, zō   wa hana ga nagai
peacock TOP feather SUB big   elephant TOP nose SUB long
'The peacock has big feathers and the elephant has a long nose.'

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
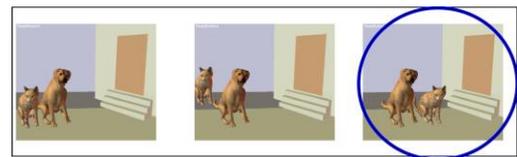
To informant 1:
*Make a short statement, what is going on in the highlighted scene, in order that your partner will identify it. Please do not mention the picture, just give a short description of the highlighted scene, so that it is clearly identified from the others. Before you make your description, **look very carefully about the differences** among the pictures, so that your description effectively identifies the relevant picture.*

    To informant 2:
    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 *Pǔmǐ* 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	waiqueev	deav-chiif=si.
this	dog	Top	now	bed	Attr	leftside	up-stand=Pft

'**This dog**, it has now stood on the leftside of the bed.'

Frame-setting Topic

Bbo	hmezha		ggi	nef	nia	jjijji	dov	kie	bbo
Dsc	young.woman		Top	3.s	Dsc	book	read	time	Frs

	neaggif	ruevruenf	gge-qionf.
	again	ring	out-appear

'When **the young woman** she read the book, the ring was on again.'

Qii	ggon	mif	ggi	nea-giefgie	bbo	sienbbonvbien	wu	ea-xiiv=si.
dog	Spc.Ag	person	Spc	down-chase	Frs	forest	in	in-go=Pft

'(Because) **the dog was chasing the man**, (they) went into the forest.'

Types of topic (2)

	Aboutness Topic (AbT)	Frame-setting Topic (FsT)
Explicit Referent	Contrastive AbT	Contrastive FsT
Implicit Referent	Implicational AbT	Implicational FsT

Contrastive Aboutness Topic

Peatefmi	bbo	re	pien,	qii	bbo	zzheafggi	giefgie=rio.
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

Waiqueev	bbie	bbo	jinv	di	ddionf,
leftside	Dat	Frs	house	one	exist.inan

sshiiqueev	bbie	bbo	qii	di	xxeef.
rightside	Dat	Frs	dog	one	exist.an

'**On the left** there is a house; **on the right** there is a dog.'

Types of topic (3)

Implicational Aboutness Topic

Eav	bbo	rueaf	mansienv	bbo,	… …
1.s	Ctr	road	know.1.s	Frs	

'**As for me (unlike others)**, I know the way, … …'

After-thought Topic

…	ref=a	dev	sienbbonv	kon	ea-qu=si,	dev	mif	ggi.
	front=Attr	this	tree	on	in-knock=Pft	this	person	Top

'… knocked (himself) on the tree in front (of him), **this man**.'

Types of topic and topic marking in Prinmi

	zero	*ggi*	*bbo*	*ggi bbo*
Function		Topic; Accessible Referent	Contrast; Frame-setting	Contrastive topic
Aboutness Topic (AbT)	√	√		
Frame-setting Topic (FsT)	√		√	
Contrastive AbT		(√)	√	√
Contrastive FsT			√	
Implicational AbT			√	√
After-thought Topic		√		

The information structure of topic construction

Information Structure
- FsT / Clause
- Hanging Topic
- AbT / Comment (Predicate)
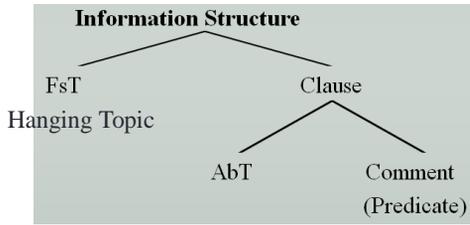
Complexity of the topic-comment construction (1)

Contrastive topic-comment construction

Topic$_1$-Comment$_1$ + Topic$_2$-Comment$_2$ (+ … + Topic$_n$-Comment$_n$)

Hniqionv=re	bbo	seeliov	zziif=rio,
young.man=Pl	Ctr	pear	eat=Impf
mezha=re	bbo	xiangvjiaof	zziif=rio.
young.woman=Pl	Ctr	banana	eat=Impf

'The young men are eating pears, the young women are eating bananas.'

Peatefmi	ggon	bbo	gguen	gganf	nea-zzuaif=si,
young.man	Spc.Ag	Ctr	horse	above	down-ride.3=Pft
mezha	ggon	nie bbo	danvche	gganf	nea-zzuaif=si.
young.woman	Spc.Ag	Dsc Ctr	bicycle	above	down-ride.3=Pft

'The young man has ridden the horse; the young woman has ridden the bicycle.'

Complexity of the topic-comment construction (2)

Chained comment construction

Topic + Comment$_1$ + Comment$_2$ (+ … + Comment$_n$)

Zuuv_geazai	ggi	bbo,	$_{C1}$zhiif	wu	tea-da	baf.$_{C1}$
son_little	Top	Ctr	market	in	from.spk-reach	do
$_{C2}$xifhongshi	ggi	tea-hruuv,$_{C2}$		$_{C3}$juevmie	dde-da.$_{C3}$
tomato	Spc	from.spk-buy		home	to.spk-reach

'The little son (unlike the others), (he) made it to the market, bought the tomato, and arrived home.'

Xueev	bbo	sshiiqueev	bbie	dev hniqionv	son_zii	ggi	$_{C1}$deafme
night	FrS	rightside	Dat	this guy	three_Cls	Top	each
xxia	wu	jjiiv deaf_die	dde-sshav,$_{C1}$	$_{C2}$duduvbbo	tea-shii=si.$_{C2}$
hand	in	fish one_Cls	to.spk-take	cap	Ctr from.spk-take.off=Prf

'At night, these three guys on the right, each took a fish in hand, took off their caps.'

Complexity of the topic-comment construction (3)

Recursive topic-comment construction

Hanging Topic$_S$ + Comment
//
Topic$_{S1}$-Comment$_1$ (+ … + Topic$_{Sn}$-Comment$_{Sn}$)

Topic$_n$
Topic$_2$
Topic$_1$ **Hanging Topic**
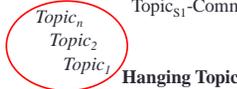
Dewuv=a	dev	mif	neaf_zii	ggi	$_{T1}$deavgeaflia bbo$_{T1}$	$_{C1}$xxienv
here=Attr	this	person	two_Cls	Top	one	Ctr cigarette
	tien=rio.$_{C1}$		$_{T2}$deavgeaflia bbo$_{T2}$	$_{C2}$yinfliao	tien=rio.$_{C2}$
	drink=Impf		one	Ctr	soft drink drink=Impf

'These two persons here, one is smoking cigarette; one is drinking soft drink.'

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 furthered divided into contrastive topic and implicational topic;
- Semanto-syntatically, 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 aboutseness 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

Chafe, Wallace. 1976. Givenness, contrastiveness, definiteness, subjects, topics, and point of view. In Charles Li (ed.), *Subject and Topic*. Academic Press, New York, pp. 25–55.

Ding, Picus S. 2000. Topic-comment Constructions in Prinmi. Proceedings of the 33rd International Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics. Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University.

————. 2003. Prinmi: A sketch of Niuwozi. In Thurgood, G. and R. LaPolla (Eds.), *Sino-Tibetan Languages*. Routledge Press, London, pp. 588-601.

Gundel, Jeanette K., 1988. Universals of topic-comment structure. In: Hammond, M., E. Moravcsik and J. Wirth (Eds.), *Studies in Syntactic Typology*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp. 209-239.

Iwasaki, Shoichi & Preeya Ingkaphirom. 2005. *A Reference Grammar of Thai*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jacobs, Joachim. 2001. The dimensions of topic-comment. *Linguistics* 39: 641-681.

Li, Charles and Sandra Thompson. 1976. Subject and topic: a new typology of language. In: Li, C. (Ed.), *Subject and Topic*. Academic Press, New York, pp. 457-489.

Lu, Shaozun. 1983. *Pumiyu jianzhi* [A brief account of the Pumi language]. Beijing: Nationalities Publisher.

Tsujimura, Natsuko. 2007. *An Introduction to Japanese Linguistics* (2nd ed). Oxford: Blackwell.