

TOPICALITY OF OBJECT AND GROUNDING IN BALINESE NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

I Wayan Pastika
Udayana University, Bali
<Pastika59@yahoo.com>

1 Introduction

In this paper, I will discuss how the topicality of O(bject) relates to grounded information (see also Hopper 1979; Myhill 1992:59-80; Cumming 1991: 175--186). There are three questions which need to be asked here. First, does a highly topical O correlate with foregrounded information, while a non topical one correlates with backgrounded information? Second, if it does, then why should there be such a correlation? Third, is grounding an independent factor which influences voice selection or is any correlation between grounding and voice selection a consequence of the typical characteristics of the arguments found in Foregrounding (FG) and Backgrounding (BG)?

2 The Concept of Grounding Information and Topicality

2.1 *Grounding Information*

The definition of 'grounding' is adopted from Hopper's (1979:213-214) framework. According to Hopper, narrative texts can be divided into two major components i.e. 'the language of the actual story line and the language of supportive material which does not itself narrate the main events'. His examples from Swahili show that the difference between clauses conveying main events (which he terms 'foregrounded events') and clauses in non-main events (which he terms 'backgrounded events') has something to do with sequentiality: the main events mostly occur sequentially (i.e. one event succeeds another on time line) while the non-main events are not in sequence with the main events but amplify them.

2.2 *Topicality*

According to Givón (1994:9), topicality of nominal referents has two components which are both 'cognitively significant' and 'methodologically measurable':

- (a) "Anaphoric accessibility: Whether the current referent has prior text antecedence, and if so how far back and how cognitively accessible that antecedence is."
- (b) "Cataphoric persistence: Whether the current referent recurs in the following text, and if so how frequently, and thus presumably how thematically important or attentionally activated it is."

To measure topicality, Givón (1979, 1983, 1984) proposes three types of quantitative measurements. Those types are (i) referential distance ('look back'), (ii) potential interference ('ambiguity') and (iii) persistence ('decay'). In my study, only R(eferential) D(istance) and T(opik) P(ersistence) are applied because these two methods 'are based on an assumption that more topical (thematically important) referents tend to be both more anaphorically accessible ('continuous') and more cataphorically persistent ('recurrent') (Givón 1994:10). These are also easier to measure than 'potential interference.'

3 A Sketch of the Balinese Voice System

I will use the terms A, O and S, which were introduced by Dixon (1972) to refer to the ‘universal syntactic-semantic primitives’. For Dixon (1972, 1979 and 1994), S=‘intransitive subject’, A=‘transitive subject’ and O=‘transitive object’. I will follow Andrews’ (1985) more formal definitions of these notions.

The term ‘voice’ is used here to refer to different ways of linking arguments to A, S and O functions. These linkings of arguments in Balinese are represented by three different constructions: two transitive voices (e.g. N(asal) T(ransitive) and Z(ero) T(ransitive) as well as a passive voice (e.g. the intransitive *ka-* passive). These three voices are illustrated in examples (1), (2) and (3):

- (1) Nglaut ia ngojog dagang bebek (BLG 33)
 then3 NT-approach seller duck
Then he (= Belog) approaches a duck seller.
- (2) Nglaut dagang bebek ojog-a.
 Then seller duck ZT approach-3Agt
Then he (= Belog) approaches a duck seller (then a duck seller, he approaches).
- (3) Nglaut dagang bebek-e ka-ojog (baan ia)
 Then seller duck-DEF PSV-approach by 3
Then the duck seller is approached by him.

Artawa (1994), Roberts (1995) and Artawa and Blake (1997) show that these three voices differ in which argument is assigned to the ‘pivot’ role. A syntactic pivot of a construction is defined by van Valin (1993:56) as a privileged syntactic function with respect to that construction. Balinese has clear syntactic pivots with respect to which NP can be raised, relativised, etc. For a summary, see Roberts (1995:204-208).

The Nasal Transitive is a transitive construction which is morphologically marked by a nasal prefix and has A as pivot, as in example (1). Zero Transitive, on the other hand, is a transitive construction which is morphologically unmarked and has O as pivot, as in example (2). The *ka-* passive has the prefix *ka-* to mark the passive construction, as in example (3). In the *ka-* passive, the pivot is S as it is the only core argument. My use of the term ‘pivot’ here is equivalent to Arka’s (1998:9-10) ‘grammatical function subject.’

4 Topicality of O and Grounding

In this section, I present data concerning the correlation between grounding and topicality and the interaction of grounding, topicality and voice. A correlation between a highly topical O and FG is proven by the statistics presented in Table 1.

Table 1: *Overall frequency of combinations of topicality and grounding*

Topicality	FG	BG	Total
Topical O	273 (64%)	152 (33%)	425 (48%)
Non-topical O	154 (36%)	302 (67%)	456 (52%)
Total	427 (100%)	454 (100%)	881 (100%)

Table 2 below shows that a topical O usually occurs with FG, while a non-topical O usually occurs with BG. Hopper (1979: 215-227) has observed that FG clauses typically have a few, usually highly topical, participants (see also Myhill, 1992:59). In BG, on the other hand, there is a greater likelihood of having non-topical participants because new mentions are introduced and described in BG clauses. O participants in FG are usually topical because FG clauses usually maintain the same participants for a while before new participants are introduced in BG clauses. On the other hand, BG clauses carry descriptions, amplifications, expansions and collateral information, and are therefore likely to contain a good deal of new information. This means that BG clauses are more likely to get non-topical participants. From the data I have seen so far, it would appear that A must still usually be topical in BG clauses while O is more likely to be non-topical.

Now that I have established the correlation between grounding and the topicality of O, I can turn to the question of the interaction of grounding, topicality and voice. Specifically, is the high frequency of ZT with FG simply an automatic consequence of the fact that O is usually topical in FG? Or is FG an independent factor, enhancing the already strong tendency of ZT to be used when O is highly topical and perhaps reducing the tendency of BG being used when O is not highly topical? Some relevant statistics are given in Table 2.

Table 2: *Overall frequency of topicality of O, grounding and voice*

Transitive Clause Types	Topical O		Non-topical O	
	FG	BG	FG	BG
ZT	255 (93%)	99 (65%)	57 (37%)	36 (12%)
NT	18 (7%)	53 (35%)	97 (63%)	266 (88%)
Total	273 (100%)	152 (100%)	154 (100%)	302 (100%)

It is clear from Table 2 that if grounding does play a role in voice selection, it is much less important than the topicality of O. Rather than grounding, topicality is the more important factor in determining voice selection because there is strong statistical evidence that ZT is usually chosen if O is highly topical, whether in FG or BG. NT is normally selected if O is not topical in either in FG or BG.

However, Table 2 also shows clearly that the combination of topicality and grounding is a strong predictor of voice selection. In particular, the combination of FG with a highly topical O almost guarantees ZT while the combination of BG with an O having non-topicality is a very good predictor of NT.

Example (4) below shows how the ZT clauses in (b), (c) and (d) are used to convey foregrounded events. Only the ZT clause in (c) has a highly topical O in two dimensions, while the ZT clause in (b) has a highly topical O in terms of TP, but not RD. The ZT clause in (d) has a highly topical O in RD. (The N(oun) P(hrase) *padi* ‘rice (in its husk)’ is mentioned before in the fourth preceding clause but the NP *pepetan* ‘husks’ is first mentioned in (b) below.

- (4)a. Kenten satuan I Dedari Sang Sungpraba
that story ART. angel Sang Sungpraba
- b. raris kenten pepetan padi-n-e
then that husks rice (in its husk)-LIG-DEF

nika kaat-a
that ZT cut off-3Agt
- c. Ø jang-a samping jineng-e
(husks) ZT put-3Agt side paddy’s store-DEF
- d. nika tunjel-a pepetan-n-e nika
that ZT burn-3Agt husks-LIG-DEF that
- e. sampun ia ma-tunjel
after 3 MAI-burn
- f. andus-ne nika nika kenten saluk-a
smoke-3POSS’R that that like that ZT put on-3Agt
baju-n ipun-e
dress-LIG 3-DEF
- g. lantas ipun nutut-ang andus menek
then 3 NT-follow-APPL smoke upward

(The referent ‘paddy husks’ is not mentioned in any of the ten clauses following in (g)) That is the word of the Angel Sang Sungpraba. Then, that ... She cuts off those rice husks. She puts (them) next to the paddy’s store. She burns those husks. She puts on her dress after the husks are burnt. Then, she follows the smoke upward.

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In (4b), the O participant, the full NP *pepetan padi-n-e nika* is highly topical in terms of TP. In (4c), the O participant, Zero Anaphora ‘rice husks’ is highly topical in both dimensions (RD and TP); and in (4d), the O participant, the reintroduced full NP *pepetan-n-e nika* ‘that paddy’s husks’ is highly topical in respect of RD with some topicality in TP. The use of ZT in (4d) relates to an associative anaphoric referent and sequential events. In this clause, the referent ‘her dress’ is associated with ‘the smoke of the husks.’ Here the story is that the Angel can only fly to heaven, if she wears her own dress while being cov-