

Discourse functions of auxiliaries in the Bouyei origin myth

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1. Introduction to the Bouyei people and their language

The Bouyei language belongs to the northern group of the Tai language family (Li 1960). It is spoken by a Tai ethnic group with a population of more than 2,500,000. The main areas inhabited by the Bouyei people are in the south, south-west, and central parts of Guizhou Province in China. In Guizhou province, seventy percent of the total Bouyei population live in Qiannan and Qianxinan prefectures (Snyder 1995). A small number of Bouyei also live in Yunnan, Sichuan, and the mountainous areas of northern Vietnam (Zhou Guoyan, Forthcoming).

The Bouyei people are also known by the names of *pu⁴?jai⁴*, *pu⁴?ji⁴*, or *pu⁴?joi⁴*. Yay [jei] is the most frequently used autonym of the Bouyei (Synder 1995). In Thailand, Bouyei are known by the name Tai Dioi (Tai Yoi) which refers to Bouyei people residing in Vietnam.

The variety of Bouyei language used in this study is called Niuchang¹ Bouyei language, which is spoken in the town of Zhenfeng county, Guizhou Province. The data were collected and transcribed in phonetic symbols by a native speaker of Bouyei language². Though the origin myth was mainly treated in this study, two additional texts are also used as supplementary data. The two texts were “How the Sun and the Moon came into being” and “The flood.”

The phonology of Bouyei is described by Zhou Guoyan (Forthcoming) as follows:

The Niuchang Bouyei variety has twenty-nine initial consonants. The underlined symbols below are consonants found in modern Chinese loan words.

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¹Niuchang is a small town in Zhenfeng county, Guizhou Province. The name of the town has now been changed to Xingbei.

²The data were part of the collaborative work entitled *Kam-Tai Oral Literatures* (1998) compiled by the linguists of the Institute of Language and Culture for Rural Development, Mahidol University and the Kam-Tai Institute, the Central University for Nationalities (CUN), Beijing. The Bouyei oral literature was collected by Zhou Guoyan, a linguist of CUN.

p		t		k
<u>ph</u>		<u>th</u>		kh
ʔb		ʔd		
<u>f</u>	θ	s	ɕ	h
v~w	ð	<u>z</u>		ɣ
		<u>ts</u>	tɕ	
		<u>tsh</u>	tɕh	
m		n	ɲ	ŋ
		l	j	
ʔw			ʔj	

The vowel system has seven simple vowels and five diphthongs as follows:

i	ɯ	u	ie	iu	ue
e	ə	o			
	a		ia	ua	

The Niuchang variety has six non-stopped tones as follows:

	Tone categories	Tone shapes	Tone value	Samples
1	mid level	33	na ¹	‘thick’
2	mid falling	31	na ²	‘rice field’
3	high level	55	na ³	‘face’
4	high falling	42	na ⁴	‘mother’s or wife’s younger brother’
5	low rising	24	na ⁵	‘arrow’
6	low level	11	na ⁶	‘otter’

Before proceeding to the discussion of Bouyei auxiliaries, there are some disclaimers to make. This paper does not cover all auxiliaries found in the Bouyei language. The auxiliaries to be treated here are limited to those that display discourse functions in one lengthy text (the origin myth), and two supplementary texts. Examples given in this paper are from the origin myth unless otherwise indicated.

2. Theoretical framework

Since the roles of auxiliaries are closely interwoven with various kinds of discourse information, the models of discourse information as developed by Longacre (1990, 1996), and Grimes (1975) were used as the guidelines of this study.

Grimes (1975) classifies the information in a narrative discourse into participants (and props), events, and nonevents. Nonevents are classified as setting, background, evaluation, and collateral (irrelis). Setting includes expository and descriptive materials which report the place, time, and circumstances under which actions take place. Background includes nonpunctiliar, nonsequential activities and states that do not advance the storyline but temporarily overlap with storyline actions and events. Evaluation is intrusive material which includes the author's own evaluation. Collateral or irrelis has to do with all possible events which might or might not happen. It consists of anything that suggests possible alternatives, such as negation, questions, futures, imperatives, or predictions.

Longacre (1990) proposes that a text is seen as an intricate interweaving of noun phrases (for participants and props) and verb phrases (for events and many nonevents). He makes a distinction between events and non-events by pointing out that events determine an 'event-line' or 'storyline' which is referred to as any happening that pushes the story forward whereas non-events are the rubric, supportive or tributary material. The storyline is semantically defined as any happenings that indicate punctuality, sequentiality, and (most often) volition. Punctiliar happenings include actions and events that are well articulated as to inception, terminus, or both. The sequential happenings involve the regular chronological succession of actions and events. The volitional happenings are actions or events that are conscious or planned.

3. Semantic categories of auxiliaries and their realizations

In this study, auxiliary is defined as verbal elements that modify the meanings of the co-occurring verbs in terms of aspect, modality, additive, and directionality.

Aspect is defined as "the category expressing the temporal structure of the event itself without regard to its participants" (Foley and Valin 1984:209). Comrie (1981:3) gives a general definition of aspect as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency" and classifies aspect into two main categories, i.e. perfective and imperfective. The perfective denotes a complete situation, with beginning, middle, and end. The semantic element of perfective is the termination of the situation, that is, the situation is viewed as a single complete whole. The imperfective indicates a situation in progress and pays essential attention to the internal structure of the situation (duration, phasal sequences). It is further subcategorised into habitual and continuous.

Modality is characterised as "the speaker's estimate of the relationship of the actor of the event to its accomplishment, whether he has the obligation, the intention, or the ability to perform it" (Foley and Valin 1984:214).

Additive is defined as “a related pattern, that of semantic SIMILARITY, in which the source of cohesion is the comparison of what is being said with what has gone before” (Halliday and Hasan 1976:247). Additive has to do with discourse cohesion/coherence in that it characterises the repeated occurrences of identical events.

Directionals are treated as nuclear operators³ which “express a directional orientation of the nucleus, whether the action is up, down, toward, or away from some point of reference” (Foley and Valin 1984:212).

The semantic categories of Bouyei auxiliaries are realized by the following auxiliaries:

Semantic categories	Realizations ⁴
Aspect	Preserial verbs <i>ɕi</i> ³ ‘then, consequently’ <i>ʔdai</i> ⁴ ‘to experience’ Postserial verbs <i>leu</i> ⁴ ‘already, completive’ <i>pai</i> ¹ ‘continuous’ <i>ʔju</i> ⁵ ‘continuous’
Modality	Preserial verbs <i>ma</i> ⁴ ‘must’ <i>ɣa</i> ² ‘will’ <i>ðo</i> ⁴ ‘able’ <i>pai</i> ¹ ‘able’ <i>juan</i> ⁶ ‘be willing to’ <i>tɕai</i> ² ‘want to’ Postserial verb <i>ʔdai</i> ⁴ ‘able’
Additive	Preserial verb <i>je</i> ⁴ ‘also’
Directional	Postserial verbs <i>pai</i> ¹ ‘direction away from the speaker’ <i>ma</i> ¹ ‘direction toward the speaker’

³According to Foley and Valin (1984), the nucleus is the innermost layer of the clause which contains the predicate.

⁴Some auxiliaries are grammaticalized forms of the main verbs such as *ʔdai*⁴ ‘to get, to obtain,’ *pai*¹ ‘to go,’ *ma*¹ ‘to come,’ *ʔju*⁵ ‘to be at,’ and *ðo*⁴ ‘to know.’