

Highlighting through the Particle *swe?*
in Sgaw Karen narrative Discourse

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Many languages have particles and affixes that are problematic to the grammatical analysis. The functions and meanings of these particles and affixes are not easy to identify on a clause or sentence level because they are determined by the structure of connected discourse (Longacre 1976). This claim is supported by the evidence from Sgaw Karen¹, a language of Tibeto-Burman family.

In this language, there are several particles that have discourse functions. Among these particles, the particle *swe?* is dominant. This particle occurs in all texts² even though narrated by different native speakers. In some texts it may occur with great frequency, whereas in other texts it is only occasionally present. This is not a matter of idiolects because its frequency of occurrence also varies in texts narrated by the same individuals. At first glance it seems to be randomly distributed. It may be preferred at any point where the narrator's emotions are involved. However, a closer look on discourse level reveals its function and meaning.³

The particle *swe?* is usually attached to thematic material, i.e. the significant information of narrative discourse called backbone or storyline which is opposed to supportive material called background or non-storyline.⁴ Its first occurrence within the story is tied to the plot structure⁵ of the story. The particle *swe?* first appears

at the inciting incident in texts 1, 2, 4 and 6; at the developing conflict in text 3; and at the climax in text 5. Its common function is to provide chronological theme line cohesion to a discourse. That is, it indicates progression to a new backbone event or activity. However, not all backbone events or actions are marked by this particle. The purpose of this study is to discuss the situations in which *swe?* is used to mark temporal progression in discourse. It is found that the narrators used this particle when they aimed to highlight an important chronological juncture, a backreferent to the previous crucial event or activity, a connectivity of crucial successive events or activities, a new cycle of a cyclical episode, a thematicity switch, a thematic participant within an identification sequence and a role reversal.

1. Highlighting an important chronological juncture

Temporal phrases or words that are preceded or tagged by the particle *swe?* encode major time settings of the following crucial events or activities. While *swe?* indicates important chronological juncture, it also indicates progression along the backbone. The following examples, 1 and 2, from text 2 and text 4 respectively, illustrate the function of *swe?* with temporal expressions to highlight important time settings.

Example 1

létókòhò nì nè mé vèhò
first day that let sister
vèkó lè ?ò
eldest take-care him

'On the first day, [we, all
sisters] let the eldest
sister take care of him
[the baby].

swe? mùmchèthò ?à pù
pt. in-the-morning he younger sister
xú va lé klòhò
six cl. go pull grass

In the morning, the six
younger sisters went to
pull grass.

ʔà? vè̀nò vè̀kó ò? lókhí
 she sister eldest be behind
 lù phósàhó va nè
 take-care child cl. that

The eldest sister was
 [left] behind to take
 care of that baby.'

The context of this example is that six sisters who owned seven pigs wanted to have a little baby sister or brother and talked about what they wanted. A giant overheard them and disguised himself as a baby boy. The six sisters found him and took him home. They decided to take turns taking care of the baby. The eldest sister was the first to start while the rest went to work in the field. Example 1 has the temporal word *mùchethò* preceded by the particle *swe?*. The function of *swe?* is to highlight the temporal setting of the following crucial events in which the story develops its conflict. That is, while the eldest sister was taking care of the baby brother and fell asleep, the baby became a giant and ate a big pig.

Example 2

swe? swe? vè vè ne tà khí
 pt. pt. finally completely dark
 ʔà wé kó? kwà? kwà?
 he emp.mk. cry sound of toad
 nù? lé hòkhò bè?là?
 enter in ground under

'Finally, [it was] completely
 dark. He cried "kwa kwa"
 [and] went underground.

nòtáhó ké cì? cì? zò
 deer return run run step on
 bà? lùsà khómé
 touch, hit gourd stem

The deer returned [and] ran.
 [He] stepped on the stem
 of a gourd.'

The context of example 2 is that a toad and a deer exchanged labor. The toad went to help the deer work first. The deer provided lunch for the toad and took him home. When it was the turn of the deer, the toad neither gave him lunch nor took him home. After work, the toad

went into a hole under the ground. The deer had to return alone. While running, he stepped on the stem of a gourd.

The particle *swe?* in example 2 highlights the time juncture encoded by the temporal phrase *vè vè nè tà khi* 'Finally, [it was] completely dark'. This time juncture is crucial for the development of the story because it was the nighttime and thus the deer could not see the gourd and stepped on it. With this temporal phrase *swe?* occurs twice. Its double occurrence confirms the importance of the following events which form the climax of the story.

2. Highlighting a backreference

The effect of tagging a backreferential clause with *swe?* is twofold. On the one hand *swe?* highlights the completion of the previous crucial event restated by the backreferential clause which serves as a point of reference for the following crucial event. On the other hand the backreferential clause tagged by *swe?* indicates that the crucial backbone event expressed by the independent clause represents progression from the preceding backbone event. The backreferential clause usually occurs without an overt subject as in the following example from text 2.

Example 3

phósàhó va ne lò? mí ?asá? 'That child pretended to
child cl. that pretend sleep himself sleep.

lò? mí ?asá? <u>swe?</u> pa vènò	[After the child] had pre-
pretend sleep himself pt. she sister	tended to sleep, the eldest
wèkó chómowé à?tà mí dè?	sister thought he [the
eldest think her child sleep then	child] was asleep.'
mí míno ?à khòthí?	
sleep lie down to sleep him beside	
nè mí	
that sleep	

The context continues from example 1. After the eldest sister fed the baby and put him in the crib, the baby pretended he was asleep. In this example the repetitive adverbial clause *lò? ní ʔasá?* 'pretend one was asleep' was tagged by *swe?* to highlight the completion of the previous crucial event and to indicate that the following crucial event builds on the previous one.

3. Highlighting a connectivity of successive events

A serial clause construction is often used to encode successive events or activities which are closely connected. It consists of a series of clauses with one overt subject present in the initial clause. The following clauses have zero anaphora as their subjects (Burusphat 1986). The events or activities encoded by this construction are chronologically related and have the same overall setting or point of reference. The particle *swe?* precedes the second clause. It marks progression of a new event or activity which builds on the preceding event or activity and highlights a connectivity of these two successive events or activities as in the following example from Text 5. The clauses are numbered for convenience of reference.

Example 4

- | | | |
|------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Cl.1 | <i>ʔà wé ke tò sí ʔà</i> | 'He returned to hit a male |
| | he emp.mk. return hit die he | pig [until it] died. |
| | <i>thó?phá</i> | |
| | pig male | |
| Cl.2 | <i>swe? kó mé pa hé ʔò?</i> | Then [he] called [other] |
| | pt. call eat people come eat | people to come to eat |
| | | [it].' |

The context of this example is that a king had seven daughters. He wanted the youngest daughter to get married. So he announced that if any man could sleep in the *khló?*, i.e. a kind

of big bell used for special occasions, the king would let him marry his daughter. Because of the cold, everybody who volunteered died within the *khló?*. However, one young man survived because of his wit. The king refused to let him marry his daughter. Then he went to consult an owl. The owl told him to kill a male pig. The following events are in example 4 and they are chronologically connected by the particle *swe?*.

In some instances of serial clause construction, the particle *swe?* is also used to connect a set of events or activities with another. In doing this, it further indicates a change of direction from a set of events or activities to another as in example 5 from Text 2.

Example 5

- Cl.1 *phósàhó kwà pva mí lí* 'The child saw the person
child see person sleep already [the eldest sister] sleep.
- Cl.2 *swe? vethè ró? lòthòsá? dó?sàká?* then [he] got up, sneaked
pt. get up sneak disguise giant to disguise as a very old

pva sí tá dú giant,
old very one cl.
- Cl.3 *lò ?ò? thó? phá phàdò? lé* [he] went down to eat a
go down eat pig male big at whole big male pig under
khòlàdé ne là? the house,
the-space-under-a-house that whole
tà dú
one cl.
- Cl.4 *swe? kè thò ?ò? dó? lé chù?* then [he] returned to get
pt. return go up be a.aux.⁶ at crib back into that crib,
pu ne
in that

Cl.5 lòthòsá? phòsàhó
disguise child

[he] disguised as a child,

Cl.6 hò dó rúrú
cry again continually

[he] cried continually.'

The context of this example is example 3. In this example clauses 2 and 3 carry a set of activities and clauses 4,5,6 encode another set. These two sets are connected chronologically by the particle swə?.

4. Highlighting a new cycle of a cyclical episode

A cyclical construction is also found in the data. This construction involves going around and around in multiple cycles. The first cycle conveys new information while the following cycles consist of new situations with semantically similar activities.⁷

In Sgaw Karen texts swə? is frequently used to introduce a new cycle other than the first one. However, the attachment of swə? to a new cycle is not obligatory. The preference of this particle at any point has to do with the speaker's emotions (cf. Leenhouts 1978). Example 6 illustrates series of eight cycles. The second, third, fourth, and sixth cycles are introduced by swə?. The whole episode is very lengthy, therefore only three cycles are given. In this example swə? introduces the second and the third cycles.

Example 6

náthí sà?pvìtá
water spirit angry

'The water spirit was angry.

First cycle

sá lə ʔòʔlò? nã?
will go repay wild banana

[He] would go to ask the
wild banana to pay for
[his son's death].

nã? tɛ pə sɪnã nɔ lɛ
wild banana say I know you go

The wild banana said, "How
do I know? Go and ask the

ca tho? pè ò? dà? wé tǎ va
 ask pig I be a.aux. a.aux. one cl.
 pǎtǎklǎ pǎtǎnǎ hǎ cǐ?
 I myself was not strong come run
 cǐ? bà? pva pǎ rǐ?xǎ?
 hit touch/hit person I roll down
 pǎ bà? nǎ tǎvǎtǎvǎ pǎ té
 I touch, hit you whatever I not
 sìǎ
 know

pig. I was alone. I [myself]
 was not strong. [The pig]
 ran [and] hit me. I rolled
 down. I hit you. I did not
 know what [I hit]."

Second cycle

swe? náthí lé cá? dǎ? tho?
 pt. water spirit go ask again pig
 tho? té pǎ sìǎ nú pǎ ?ò? dà?
 pig say I know q.pt. I be a.aux.
 wé pǎ swí pǎ té sìǎ tǎ?è?
 a.aux. my pigsty I not know what

Then the water spirit went
 to ask the pig.
 The pig said, "How do I know?
 I was alone in my pigsty.
 I did not know anything.
 A cobra crawled into my

vǎsǎ hǎ blǎ? pǎ swí pǎ cí
 cobra come crawl my pigsty I run
 nǎ?cǐ?nǎ?co
 without direction

pigsty. I ran without
 direction"

Third cycle

swe? lé cá? dǎ? vǎsǎ bó
 pt. go ask again cobra cl.
 vǎsǎ téwé pǎ sìǎ pǎ ?ò? dà?
 cobra say that I know I be a.aux.
 wé dilúdilà
 a.a. not interfere with anybody
 wǎ pva lǎ chǎ? bà?
 bamboo old down pierce touch, hit

Then [the water spirit]
 went to ask the cobra.
 The cobra said, "How do
 I know? I was alone, not
 interfering with anybody.
 The old bamboo fell down
 [and] pierced my backbone.
 I crawled without

pə plòkhò pə bló? direction."'
 my backbone I crawl
 nà?cì?nà?co ló
 without direction f.pt.

The context of this example continues from that of example 5. After the deer stepped on the stem of a gourd, the gourd rolled and hit the sesame. The sesame then hit a chicken's eyes. The chicken went up a bamboo tree. The bamboo tree then pierced a cobra. The cobra moved into a pigsty. A pig ran and hit a wild banana. The wild banana hit a son of water spirit. The waterspirit was angry. Example 6 is the following part of the story.

5. Highlighting a thematicity switch

A thematic agent is the major participant who is the focal or central character on a given part of narrative (Jones and Nellis 1979). Thematicity switch occurs when there is a switch of interest from one thematic agent to another as the discourse progresses. It is highlighted by the particle *swe?* only when a new thematic participant is involved in crucial events or activities such as an inciting incident, a developing conflict, and a climax. The following example from text 1 illustrates a thematicity switch highlighted by the particle *swe?*.

Example 7

<u>swe?</u> pa	ʔó	sí?	klà? nè	'Then, the person who was
pt. person	drink	liquor	cl. that	drinking said that he
té ʔà tà	tònà?co	tà		(the orphan) talked non-
say he emp.mh.	talk	nonsense	f.pt.	sense. [They] beat the
tò səkó?	có	phxòvé		orphan.
beat help together	man	orphan		
<u>swe?</u> pa	sá?pvà	tə	və ò?	Then, an old man came down
pt. person	old	one	cl. be	[and] said, "Why do you

héló	té di tò có phxòvé	beat the orphan? Before
come down say that beat man orphan		beating him, listen [to
bà?tàvâ lò sèlâ sâ kâ		him] first."
why f.pt. before you(pl) will		
tò tà né kânâ lò?ce tà		
beat him that listen first f.pt.		
tá?âwi		
finish		

<u>swé?</u> pa klâ? nè kânâ	Then, the group of them
pt. them group that listen	listened to the bird.'
kânâ thò bè? nè kó?	
listen bird cl. that say	

The context is that a husband told his wife not to let pigs out of the pigsty while he was out. But the wife let the pigs go and a snake rolled itself around a pig's leg. The wife used a stick to move the snake away from the pig. The more she did this the bigger the snake was. The big snake then rolled itself around the wife's waist and dragged her into its hole. The villagers told a pigeon to get the husband. The husband was drinking with other men and did not listen to the pigeon. An orphan man did not drink and heard what the pigeon said. He told those men what he heard. The example begins with a thematicity switch from the orphan man to a group of men. Another thematicity switch is from the group of men to an old man. The next interest switch is from the old man to the group of men. This part of the story is crucial in that the husband knew what happened to his wife and returned home to rescue her.

6. Highlighting a thematic participant within an identification sequence

After a thematic agent is identified, he is usually encoded by zero anaphora. But this thematic agent can be re-identified for emphatic prominence within the same identification sequence by

attaching the particle *swe?* to an overt subject referring to him. The purpose of *swe?* is to signal that the following event or activity involved by this thematic agent is pivotal and unexpected⁸ as in example 8 from text 2.

Example 8

Identification

<i>swe?</i> n̄ tənì dɔʔsəká? phaʔdò? tə	'One day a big giant came
pt. one day giant big one	beside the field.
dú h́ h́ lə x̣ə? x̣ə	
cl. come come at field beside	

Re-identification

ʃ n̄hú nekhḷẉ? ẉé ʔa	[He] overheard them [seven
[he] hear hide a.aux. then	sisters] talking to each
tà ṭé lɔʔsá?	other.
in progress talk each other	

Re-identification for emphatic prominence

<i>swe?</i> dɔʔsəká? dú nè	That giant disguised [himself]
pt. giant cl. that	as a very lovely good baby boy.
ke lɔthòsá? phósàhó phòkhwáphó	[He] came [and] was crying
return disguise child baby boy	beside the field.'

tà va lɔʔè? vé lèʔlè? h́ h̄
one cl. lovely good very come cry
lə x̣ə x̣ə nè
at field beside that

The context is the same as example 1. (In this example the particle *swe?* occurs twice. The effect of the first *swe?* is to highlight a temporal setting. In the meantime it also indicates progression along the backbone). The second *swe?* provides emphatic prominence for the thematic agent of an unexpected pivotal event, that

is, the giant disguised as a baby boy. This thematic agent is given even more emphasis by attaching *dè nè* 'classifier that' to the noun *dó?sèká?* 'giant'.

7. Highlighting a role reversal

When the particle *swe?* attaches to a thematic agent, it sometimes signals a role reversal event, i.e. there will be a radical change of some one's fortunes in a story where the aggressor will become the victim and vice versa (Longacre 1976). The example of a role reversal from text 4 is illustrated below.

Example 9

<i>nòde?kwò? nòtáhó</i>	<i>lɛ</i>	'A toad and a barking deer
toad	barking deer go	went to exchange their
<i>mádólò? sá?</i>		labor by pulling grass.
exchange labour pull grass		The toad went to work for
<i>nòde?klò? va lɛ mádó</i>		the barking deer [first].
toad person go work for		When it was time to
<i>nòtáhó múbà? ké ?ò?</i>		return [home] to eat rice,
barking deer it's time return eat		the barking deer took the
<i>mɛ nòtáhó ké ?ò? kè</i>		toad home [and gavel him
rice barking deer return eat take		rice. In the evening the
<i>?à mɛ mùhálo nòtáhó ké</i>		barking deer took the
him rice evening barking deer return		toad [home].
<i>kè ?ò</i>		
take him		

<i>swe? nòtáhó</i>	<i>lɛ mākà?ke ?ò</i>	The barking deer went to
pt. barking deer go return the labour		work for the toad. When it
<i>múbà? ?ò? mɛ tɔ ke ?ò?</i>		was time to return [home]
it's time eat rice not return eat		to eat rice, [the toad]
<i>kè wɛ mùháhá tɔ ke kè</i>		did not take [the barking
take him nighttime not return take		deer home] to eat [rice].

wé
him

At nighttime [the toad]
did not take him [home].'

The context is the same as example 2. The particle *swe?* indicates that a role reversal is coming. That is, the barking deer will become a victim and the toad will become an aggressor. This role reversal event is an inciting incident which is crucial for the development of the story.

8. Summary

This paper discusses the functions of the particle *swe?* in connected discourse. The basic function of this particle is to mark progression of the thematic events or activities. In marking progression, the particle *swe?* is specifically used to highlight an important chronological juncture, a backreference, a connectivity of successive events, a new cycle of a cyclical episode, a thematicity switch, a thematic participant within an identification sequence and a role reversal.

Even though the particle *swe?* corroborates thematic material, it is also found within embedded material encoded by a different discourse type, i.e. procedural discourse. In text 3 there were a grandmother, a granddaughter and a grandson. One day the granddaughter went to work and told the grandson how to take care of the grandmother step by step. The quote is an embedded procedural discourse in which the particle *swe?* is used to move progression an additional step along the backbone of procedural discourse.

The occurrence of *swe?* within procedural discourse shows that *swe?* not only marks progression of events or activities taken place within a completed time as in narrative discourse but also indicates progression of activities which are anticipated within a projected time as in procedural discourse.^o

In Sgaw Karen narratives, there is another discourse particle, i.e. *mló* or *bló* which behaves similarly to the particle *swe?*.

It is used interchangeably with swe? and found within only one lengthy text narrated by another elderly native speaker. As this article focuses on the particle swe?, this text is not used for the analysis. However, further study of this particle will discover its real meaning and function."

Notes

1. According to Ratanakul (1986), Sgaw Karen is accepted by most anthropologists to belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, a branch of Sino-Tibetan Stock. In Thailand, Sgaw Karen is spoken by a hill tribal group called Kariang Khaw or Yang Khaw emigrating from Burma more than two hundred years ago. This hill tribal group reside in the western half of the northern Thailand (Dhananjayananda 1983).
2. This article is based on six texts narrated by two female native speakers aged 13 and 21 years who speak a dialect of Sgaw Karen at Hua Pon village, Amphoe Khunyuan, Mae Hong Son province, Thailand. The texts are as follows:

Text 1 nò 𑜋𑜃𑜫 é

Mrs. Mue-E

Text 2 pà dó pù wè 𑜋𑜃𑜫 va

Seven sisters

Text 3 pa dó phó phí sé va

The grandmother, the granddaughter, and the grandson

Text 4 nòdè?kwò? nòtahó

The barking deer and the toad

Text 5 cōpa phó 𑜋𑜃𑜫 𑜋𑜃𑜫 va

The king and seven daughters

Text 6 pa dó pù wè khí va

Two brothers

I would like to thank Assistant Professor Amon Tawesak for checking the transcription of these texts.

3. Cf. other studies of 'mysterious' particles and suffixes in Jones and Longacre, eds. (1979)
4. The backbone or storyline is referred to as any happenings which are punctiliar, sequential, and (most often) voluntary (Longacre 1990). These happenings contribute to the movement of the narratives. The background or non-storyline includes all supportive materials other than the main line of development in a

discourse (Longacre 1983).

5. See a discussion of the notional features of climactic narrative discourse (the plot) in Longacre (1983).
6. Jones (1961) classifies aspectual auxiliaries as a word class occurring after other members of the verb class. This word class has the following members:

bá?	'emphasized action'
dá?	'minimized action'
kó?	'general or uncertain event'
dí?	'incomplete event (still,yet)'
wé	'reported event'
dó?	'continuing action'

The aspectual auxiliaries found in this study and have a similar function to the above aspectual auxiliaries include:

dá?	'minimized event or action'
wé	'reported event'
dó?	'continuing action'

7. The cyclical construction is similar to the overlay construction as found in Grimes (1975), therefore it is often mistaken as the overlay construction. In overlays, there is no temporal progression. The same facts are repeated about the same situation. But in cycles, it is different situations with similar actions by different participants. See a detailed discussion of cycling and overlaying in Thomas (1978).
8. Cf. a discussion of prominence that occurs with emphatic significance in Callow (1974).
9. See a discussion of the parameter PROJECTION used for a classification of discourse genres in Longacre (1983).
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