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**Review of Doris L. Payne and Shahar Shirtz (eds.) 2015.
Beyond Aspect: The expression of discourse functions in
African Languages. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John
Benjamins [TSL 109], Pp. vii, 321**

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► **To cite this version:**

Stéphane Robert. Review of Doris L. Payne and Shahar Shirtz (eds.) 2015. Beyond Aspect: The expression of discourse functions in African Languages. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins [TSL 109], Pp. vii, 321. 2012. hal-01678032

HAL Id: hal-01678032

<https://hal.science/hal-01678032v1>

Submitted on 30 Aug 2022

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Beyond aspect: The expression of discourse functions in African languages

ed. by Doris L. Payne and Shahar Shirtz (review)

Stéphane Robert

Language, Volume 93, Number 1, March 2017, pp. 243-247 (Review)

Published by Linguistic Society of America

LANGUAGE	
A JOURNAL OF THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF AMERICA	
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Beyond aspect: The expression of discourse functions in African languages. Ed. by DORIS L. PAYNE and SHAHAR SHIRTZ. (Typological studies in language 109.) Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015. Pp. vii, 321. ISBN 9789027206909. \$149 (Hb).

Reviewed by STÉPHANE ROBERT, *CNRS-LLACAN*

This volume presents a series of corpus-based studies analyzing the various grammatical devices used to express discourse functions and to structure narratives in some ten African languages. Thanks to the editors' efforts in setting up comparative concepts, the scope of this book doubtless goes far beyond African linguistics and should interest descriptive linguists and typologists, as well as specialists of discourse studies. The book opens with an introductory and synthetic chapter by the editors. The nine following articles, each devoted to studies on particular languages, are then ordered along language families (or phyla) of Africa.

In their substantial introductory article 'Discourse structuring and typology: How strong is the link with aspect?' (1–22), SHAHAR SHIRTZ and DORIS PAYNE very clearly define the scientific context and the general approach used here. As a common ground, the authors propose to rely on Labov and Waletzky's (1967) definitions of (a) 'narrative' as a sequence of nonoverlapping (thus bounded and perfective) events, and (b) the MAIN EVENT LINE (henceforth MEL, identified here with 'foreground') of a narrative as including propositions expressed in an isomorphic (or iconic) order to the story events. Based on previous studies and the studies in this book, Shirtz and Payne have identified seven major types of verbs or constructions used crosslinguistically to communicate FOREGROUND or MEL, in opposition to devices for BACKGROUND or non-MEL: (1) verbal constructions coding past-perfect(ive) or at least bounded or completive tense-aspect semantics, (2) verbal constructions coding 'situational dependency' (Robert 2010) of that proposition on some frame of reference, (3) syntactically independent clauses, (4) syntactically dependent clause chaining, (5) clause conjunction, (6) Austronesian-type voice, and (7) word order. Elaborating on these various points, they have discovered that there is not always a correlation between the MEL and grammatical aspect: the putative correlation between past-perfective tense-aspect forms and expression of the narrative MEL is not universally valid. After summarizing the main contributions of the various articles, Shirtz and Payne briefly present three specific models, all grounded in cognitive linguistics, which have been fruitfully used by several authors in this book for analyzing discourse structuring: those of Fauconnier (1994 [1985]), Dinsmore (1991), and Botne and Kerschner (2008). They rightfully conclude with a broader invitation for typology and cognitive sciences to collaborate on investigating the grammar-discourse interface in a crosslinguistic perspective.

The Nilo-Saharan family is illustrated first by Doris Payne's 'Aspect and thematic clause combining in Maa (Nilotic)' (23–52). This article is remarkable both in the thorough analyses conducted on a corpus of narratives and in the use made of Fauconnier's (1994 [1985]) model for this analysis of discourse structuring. Exploring whether this language has a dedicated morphosyntax for coding the temporally sequenced MEL in discourse, Payne first demonstrates that, though it can occur on sequential and semantically perfective main events, the uses of the so-called narra-

tive form (commonly attested in African languages) are not limited to marking narrative events, and she argues for a new characterization as marking ‘high thematic continuity between equally-ranked propositions’ (23). As for the form previously treated as a perfective aspect or a past tense, its various uses for indicating anteriority or relevance for the present (or current) space lead her to recategorize it convincingly as a perfect. Payne shows that this verb form is not used to demarcate foregrounded MEL material from nonsequential background but rather to initiate a MENTAL SPACE that elaborates or justifies the claim about a previously reported fact.

The next article, by HELEN EATON, ‘Main event line structure and aspect in Sandawe narratives’ (53–80), focuses on an isolated language spoken in Tanzania. Eaton argues that Sandawe does not have a specific verb form that fulfills the function of advancing the MEL in a narrative, nor does it have a set of dedicated aspect morphemes. However, the language makes use of an aspect distinction in structuring the MEL, both by signaling whether information should be interpreted as part of the MEL (this is actually marked by the use of a narrative conjunction), and by providing a temporal organization of the information (through the use of a connective vs. a narrative connective). Moreover, the distinction between perfective and imperfective aspect is used to indicate whether events are to be understood as chronologically sequential, simultaneous, or overlapping. Eaton concludes that Sandawe clauses belonging to the MEL are formally characterized by the presence of two (remarkable) forms, previously described by her as inflecting conjunctions used in clause combination: thus, the narrative conjunction is used as the default option for expressing MEL events (that is, actually for indicating sequential events in the story main line), and the repetitive conjunction is used if the event is not occurring for the first time. The author indicates that the interpretation of the repetitive conjunction, as introducing either MEL or non-MEL information, depends on the aspectual interpretation of the clause; however, this point did not stand out clearly from the presentation.

The Afro-Asiatic phylum is documented in two articles, one on an Omotic language, the other on a Berber language. In ‘The functions of non-final verbs and their aspectual categories in Northern Mao (Omotic) narrative’ (81–115), MICHAEL AHLAND deals with an (S)OV language that uses a sophisticated verbal system. This verbal system can be first divided into two sets covering ‘final’ (finite) and ‘nonfinal’ (nonfinite) verb forms or constructions. The nonfinal set is made up of three forms: one is a converb-like suffix (labeled ‘temporally integrated’ (TI)), and the other two are paired suffixes used to form ‘medial verbs’ (i.e. nonsubordinate forms prototypically occurring in chains and expressing sequential relations), one for same-subject (SS) and the other for different-subject (DS) types of clause chaining. Ahland argues that the SS and DS (medial) verbs are used to move the storyline forward by marking sequences of main events, while the (converb-like) TI verbs provide backgrounded commentary on main events (the TI clauses are often translated by a *while*-clause). Furthermore, the (optional additional) aspectual distinction on the SS and DS forms (i.e. perfect and progressive) correlates with distinct discourse functions: perfect divides discourse into major temporal sections, and progressive backgrounds events through establishing temporal overlap with the following event. Ahland indicates (101) that the main storyline is advanced through the use of the SS or DS nonfinal forms and ALSO through the final verbs, which are not studied here. The next step in research then would be to sort out the specific role of the finite forms in narrative discourse.

In ‘Aspect-mood and discourse in Kabyle (Berber) spoken narratives’ (117–43), AMINA METTOUCHI opens up groundbreaking avenues of research on the factors conditioning the expression of the main storyline, and on the role of TAM (tense-aspect-mood) markers in discourse. The close examination she conducts of a folktale and a personal recount in this tenseless language confirms the role of imperfective for backgrounding, but reveals two remarkable and overlooked points about the expression of the foreground (or MEL line): first, the role of genre and stance in the choice among aspectual forms that advance the storyline, and second, the multidimensional nature of the foregrounding in its formal expression. Thus, depending on genre, advancement of the storyline (foregrounding) is conveyed by two different forms, which share a common aspectual dimension of perfectivity but differ in their MODAL components: the perfective, a purely ‘factual’ marker (lacking the speaker’s evaluation), is the main form used in folktales or fictional

narrative passages, whereas the preverbed aorist (indicating the speaker's evaluation) is used in personal recounts involving the speaker's stance on the narrated (past) events, which are reconstructed and evoked from the standpoint of the speaker and not just factually narrated. Moreover, Mettouchi shows that foregrounding and storyline advancement (as well as backgrounding) are actually the outcome of the interaction of perfective aspect-mood forms WITH OTHER FEATURES (including verb types and information-structure devices).

The next five chapters are devoted to Niger-Congo languages. In 'The roles of dissociative and (non-)completive morphology in structuring Totela (Bantu) narratives' (145–76), THERA MARIE CRANE's primary challenge is to account for the alternation, observed in Totela narratives, between the bare forms most frequently used for narration and forms inflected for tense and aspect (corresponding to her dissociative, completive, and noncompletive forms), on which this article focuses. For this, Crane makes use of concepts elaborated out of cognitive semantics (mainly Botne & Kerschner 2008), allowing her to propose a fine-grained analysis of the role of the inflected forms in structuring the narrative. Crane uses the terms 'completive' and 'noncompletive' to refer to what seems to be a specific type of perfective and imperfective: these are associated with 'the world of time, place, and reality of the speech act' (156), in contrast with dissociative markers. Crane demonstrates the following main points: if (narrative) bare forms depict sequential events in narratives, inflected forms (used with both nonsequential and sequential event predicates) play specific roles in signaling narrative structure: the dissociative marking (through the preodiernal morpheme) appears at the beginning and ending of a narrative and frames it by shifting the cognitive domain to a world SEPARATE from the world of telling; the completive marks episode boundaries in the narrative and shows interesting resumptive uses reminiscent of the Maa perfect ones; and the noncompletive slows down the pace of the narrative and invites listener empathy by aligning listener perspective with narrative-internal perspective.

In the same vein as Crane, in 'Rethinking narrative tenses based on data from Nalu (Atlantic) and Yeyi (Bantu)' (177–217), FRANK SEIDEL uses new tools to sort out the specific roles of past forms used in narratives, studied this time in two languages belonging to two different groups. Although Seidel uses a different terminology, the new concepts used here share many aspects with those in Crane's article, but they are operationalized in a systematic way, with a comparative perspective leading to remarkably accomplished analyses. Seidel first demonstrates that the various past forms are introduced in narratives according to a regular pattern (Dinsmore's (1991) 'construct and then contextualize pattern'): first a STAGE-SETTING past form is used to construct a 'past narrative space', which is in turn elaborated on ('contextualized') by one or two different narrative forms. This systematization is an important first outcome of Seidel's work. The notion of 'detachment' used here parallels that of 'dissociating' mentioned in the previous article. Stage-setting forms are forms that 'detach' the referred event from the currently active reference frame and place it into a detached temporal realm. By contrast, the Yeyi preodiernal past and consecutive tenses, lacking this detaching power, indicate that their events happen in an ALREADY-ESTABLISHED sphere (so they require a previous frame-setting form). Moreover, the concept of dimensionalization used here is related to perfectivity but involves a temporal component by which the 'dimensionalized' form defines its own temporal space and reference-frame domain (cf. Crane's completive). These concepts allow Seidel to give an elaborated account of the complicated (and partly different) verbal systems of these two languages. Thus Seidel's analyses open up several new avenues, enabling him to go beyond the rigid and simplistic classification of verbal systems in terms of tense and aspect marking, and to more adequately account for the role of these verbal markers in structuring discourse.

In 'Narrative uses of the *Ūt-Ma'in* (Kainji) bare verb form' (219–48), REBECCA PATERSON deals with another Niger-Congo language, belonging this time to the Benue-Congo branch. In line with the two preceding articles, this study builds on cognitive semantics in order to give a particularly clear account of the narrative uses of the bare verb form in this language. This form (made of a verb stem with no TAM marking) has other uses (with various temporal readings) but is privileged in narrative discourse. In Fauconnier's (1994 [1985]) model, the devices establishing a new mental (or conceptual) space are called 'space builders'. The author demonstrates that

Ūt-Ma'in bare verb forms are used in narratives to encode sequenced events, ONCE a temporal space has been established by a 'space builder' (cf. Seidel above). She argues that the bare verb form 'does not have a temporal or aspectual meaning in itself' (219) and that its temporal interpretation is determined by the context, defined as the relevant mental space established by a previous space builder. Any interruption to the sequence of bare-form events is marked by a space builder to indicate a shift from mental space. Paterson details the various space builders found in Ūt-Ma'in narratives. She then shows how the interplay of the space builders structures the narratives in various divisions of time referring to different mental spaces. For instance, the past construction is used to establish temporal spaces at a time prior to the speaker's 'here and now', and the perfect construction interrupts a narrative sequence by FLASHING BACK to some event prior to the current temporal space.

In 'The factative and the perfective-inchoative in Cuurammā (Turka, Gur)' (249–86), COLIN SUGGETT's main concern is to sort out the meaning and usage of two specific forms, termed here 'factative' and 'perfective-inchoative'. This rich article on a Gur language would have been easier to read with a presentation of the whole verbal system at the beginning and a more targeted structuring: the proper study of narratives appears after some twenty-five pages. Nevertheless, based on a remarkable corpus study, this article provides many insightful and relevant analyses. The term 'factative' seems to me to be useful in distinguishing 'perfective' as it functions in most African languages from the Slavic-style perfective. In my view, 'factative', 'factual', 'completed', and 'completive' refer to the same specification: these perfectives are actually anchored in the time of speech, hence their past reading with dynamic verbs and present reading with stative ones. As for the perfective-inchoative, according to the very detailed uses described by Suggett, this form seems to me to correspond to a perfect as described for Wolof (Robert 2010).

The study compares the distribution of the various verb forms in dramas, conversations, and (school text) narratives. Suggett demonstrates that in Turka narratives, the clause-chaining devices (consecutive and same-subject constructions) encode all of the sequential material; factative, which is much less frequent in narratives than in conversations, is then chiefly relegated to encoding 'perfective meaning' in nonsequential contexts such as initial temporal-setting clauses, complement and relative clauses, or reported speech; the perfective-inchoative clauses encode mainly narrative *when*-clauses, 'which serve to build cohesion between paragraphs in a narrative' (285).

The last article, by RONALD P. SCHAEFER and FRANCIS OISAGHAEDE EGBOKHARE, 'Aspectual and storyline tension in Emai's (Edoid) narrative template' (287–313), ends the volume with an elaborate analysis of the functioning of Emai's tense and aspect markers: these appear to be used not only for structuring narratives into temporally organized sequences, but also as rhetorical devices for managing peak moments throughout the narration. Schaefer and Egbokhare first acknowledge the privileged role of the past perfect in the narrative, as it structures the linear progression of storyline episodes. This is consistent with the received view of perfective aspect or past tense as the means of coding for MEL clauses and their sequential ordering. However, the authors' refined analysis reveals a remarkable usage of the imperfective forms INSIDE the MEL. This is probably the most groundbreaking contribution of this study: in the episode prior to the story's climax (which itself is expressed by past perfect), the imperfective forms introduce an aspectual discontinuity in the MEL, which prepares the climax. Thus imperfect continuous and habitual, each in combination with clause repetition, alter narrative pace with deceleration and ultimately prolong time to climax. Their selective placement also identifies moments of salient information preceding climax, thus shaping narrative PEAK structure. In their conclusion, Schaefer and Egbokhare indicate that future investigation should determine whether imperfect aspect alone or clause repetition alone can serve to articulate narrative peaks. Nevertheless, this remarkable analysis already sheds new light on the supposed backgrounding function of imperfective forms in narratives, paralleling Mettouchi's point about the correlation between perfectivity and foregrounding, and opens new avenues of research on the latitude allowed by linguistic units for the speaker to create rhetorical effects.

All together, the studies in this volume lead to a much more refined view of the role of grammatical devices in structuring narratives. In particular, storyline advancement appears to result

from the COOCCURRENCE of several features involving perfectivity and also verb types and information structure. Moreover, the structure of narratives follows recurring patterns, accounting for the distribution of the various verbal forms in narratives and indicating remarkable strategies for packaging the narrative event structure in most African languages. In this view, cognitive semantics and mental spaces have proved to provide very useful tools for approaching the ‘paradox of clausal grammar’ by relating TAM markers (clausal scope) with situations or mental spaces corresponding to portions of text (discourse scope), thus delineating the discourse structure and the speaker’s going back and forth between narrative and metanarrative spaces. Furthermore, the conjoint use of comparative concepts such as the main event line opens up the possibility of a typology of the expression of discourse functions. In these respects, this book may herald a breakthrough in the study of the grammar-discourse interface.

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The phonetics–phonology interface: Representations and methodologies. Ed. by JOAQUÍN ROMERO and MARÍA RIERA. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2015. Pp. xxi, 288. ISBN 9789027248541. \$149 (Hb).

Reviewed by FELICITAS KLEBER, *Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München*

This book presents thirteen papers from the 5th Phonetics and Phonology in Iberia (PaPI) conference in June 2011 in Tarragona, Spain. These papers were selected because they ‘showcase ... the thematic and methodological richness of the work presented at the 2011 meeting ... that goes beyond the Romance realm’ (vii) and because they ‘represent a multifaceted cross section of current work on the phonetics-phonology interface’ (xix). The majority of the papers focus on Romance languages, but many will nonetheless be of interest to phoneticians and laboratory phonologists working on other languages. The volume includes papers from leading experts in the field as well as junior scientists and is intended for experienced researchers.

The thirteen papers are organized into four parts and are preceded by the editors’ introduction, which gives a critical overview of the past and current state of research and frames the following chapters in a very detailed and useful way. In particular, the editors highlight how the papers address the book’s ‘goal of deepening our understanding of the phonetics-phonology interface’ (xix) and suggest broader implications that are not always apparent in the individual papers.

The first part is on ‘First and second language acquisition’ and opens with a review chapter by CATHERINE T. BEST entitled ‘Devil or angel in the details? Perceiving phonetic variation as infor-