Theme, Rheme, and Focus in Malagasy Sign Language (TTM)

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Introduction

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Introduction

Malagasy Sign Language is the first language of many of the deaf people in Madagascar. Its name in Malagasy is Tenin'ny Tanana Malagasy (literally, Malagasy Hand Language) and it is abbreviated TTM (Minoura 2008).

I would like to take a look into the theme, rheme, and focus of TTM in this paper.

1. The data and their representation

The data have been collected in Antananarivo, Madagascar mainly from my deaf consultant Mme Raobelina Nivo Haingo Holy Tiana Eva between August 2004 and September 2012. Some data have been collected from Mme Eva and her husband M Randrianasolo Mbolatiana Richard. There are three kinds of data in my notebooks. (a) Scripted signing: Mme Eva would jot down sentences on notebooks using written Malagasy words. She was always aware that the sentences should be in TTM of the deaf people but not in written Malagasy. And although the sentences have been written using Malagasy words, most of the sentences are ungrammatical according to the written Malagasy grammar. After writing some pages, Mme Eva would sign the sentences to my video camera, with which I recorded her signing. Later I went over the video recording while looking at the notebooks with Mme Eva’s writings and made corrections. That is to say that I added words, erased words, and/or changed word orders since sometimes Mme Eva did not sign exactly in the same way as she had written in the notebooks. The second type of data are (b) non-scripted signing: Mme Eva would set up a topic and talks about it without a script
unlike in (a). The third type is (c) conversation between M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva and M Mbolatiana. The data (b) and (c) were later transcribed by the present writer and then the transcription was corrected by M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva after that.

The examples copied from my papers will be noted so. The examples from M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva’s non-scripted signing (b) will be noted e.g. (2012 NSS). The examples from M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva and M Mbolatiana’s conversation (c) will be noted e.g. (2012 CONV). The examples from M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva’s scripted signing (a) will not be noted so because they make the majority of my data. In this paper, the data are represented in five lines like in Minoura (2010:184). Instead of trying to transform all of M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva’s writings into the lines of “labels” just like I did in Minoura (2008), I am showing M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva’s writings and labels separately just like I did in Minoura (2010). This way, linguistically untrained Malagasy people, both deaf and hearing, can read the first line and can partially know what is talked about.

\begin{itemize}
\item \begin{tabular}{lcl}
1) & h-ankany & Behoririka izy  \\
& AV.FUT-go.there & Behoririka (s)he  \\
& MANKANY BEHORIRIKA IX &  \\
& go.there & Behoririka (s)he  \\
\end{tabular}
\end{itemize}

\begin{flushleft}
\textit{‘(s)he will go to Behoririka’ (Minoura 2010:184)}
\end{flushleft}

The line 1 represents what M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva has written (hyphens added in order to show morph boundaries) with the glosses in the line 2. The line 3 represents the labels to the signs and the line 4 being the glosses to the labels. I tried to make one-to-one correspondences between the labels and the signs, but this effort has not been completed, i.e. there are some many-to-one and one-to-many correspondences left. It is inevitable as spoken/written Malagasy and TTM have different categorization in their lexicons and in their grammars. You should have also noticed that the grammatical markings, e.g. AV.FUT, are present in the glosses for M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva’s writings but are lacking in the glosses for the labels of the TTM signs. This means that the grammatical distinctions suggested by written Malagasy words are lacking in TTM. E.g. the AV/UV distinction is not relevant to TTM unless the UV verb in question takes a cliticized quasi-ergative (≒ genitive) actor marking. When the AV/UV distinction is irrelevant in TTM when M\textsuperscript{ne} Eva has written down a UV form of a verb (e.g. “omena” (give [UV])), I replaced it with an AV form (e.g. MANOME (give [AV])) for the label of the sign (line 3) unless the UV form is predominantly
used in written Malagasy for the verb, e.g. TIA (like [UV]) etc. Tense is irrelevant in TTM verbs. On the other hand, tense is marked in the oblique-case preposition signs: AMIN’NY (non-past), TAMIN’NY (past) (Minoura 2008:66 fn. 2, 2010:184).

As for non-scripted signing (NSS, b) and conversation (CONV, c), the lines 1 and 2 have been completed after the video-shooting. They will be of little interest to sign language linguists but I still find the need to fill these lines so that Malagasy people, deaf and hearing, can partially know what is talked about. For these (b) and (c) data, I will enclose the lines 1 and 2 in parentheses.

In August 2012, I am feeling the need to distinguish between styles and/or registers. Mme Eva’s signing seems to contain several styles and/or several registers. Mme Eva gets stimulated by reading newspapers, talking to hearing people, thinking about speech (kabary in Malagasy), etc. and her styles and registers get affected by these and other factors. But it is still very premature for me to address these matters. My papers in future hopefully will be able to address these matters.

2. Functional sentence perspective and beyond

I would like to start from quoting Jan Firbas who was a successor of Vilém Mathesius’. Firbas (1992: 117-118, Minoura 2004: 38) argues that word order in languages, in general is determined by several principles. He writes:

The literature on word order is extensive, but of specific relevance to my research is Mathesius’ view that word order is a system constituted by the mutual relations of word order principles. These principles are essentially valid for all Indo-European languages and possibly even for languages outside the Indo-European sphere, but may differ in the extent of their operation from language to language, or even from one period to another in the development of one language. Like other systems of language, the system of word order is not viewed as closed and perfectly balanced. Mathesius emphasizes that the word-order system of a language can be understood in a more comprehensive way if it is compared with that of another language, preferably one of different structure. He refers to this approach as the method of analytical comparison.

Mathesius deals with the following word-order principles, regarding them as the most important ones: the principle of grammatical function, the principle of coherence of members, the principle of FSP, the principle of emphasis and the
principle of sentence rhythm. Other principles of minor importance could be thought of, but are not dealt with.

Firbas points out that his and Mathesius’ principle of grammatical function and principle of coherence of members can be merged into one – the grammatical principle (Firbas 1992: 118).

The partition of a sentence into the **theme** (also called **topic**) and the **rheme** (also called **comment**) is not determined by Mathesius’ and Firbas’ grammatical principle. According to Firbas, it is determined by **communicative dynamism** (CD) or by the principle of **functional sentence perspective** (FSP). Firbas (1992: 6) writes:

> (Among them,) it is necessary to distinguish between those conveying information retrievable, and those conveying information irretrievable, from the immediately relevant preceding context. It is undoubtedly the former that contribute less, and the latter contribute more, to the further development of the communication. The former are less dynamic than the latter.

Thus there are elements of a sentence conveying information retrievable from the previous context and therefore they do not add new information and are less dynamic in communication. They are called theme. Theme is sometimes described as “what is talked about.” On the other hand there are elements of a sentence conveying information irretrievable from the previous context and they add new information and is more dynamic in communication. They are called rheme (Firbas 1992: 6-7, Minoura 2004: 42).

I will try to illustrate this in simple schemes (Minoura 2004: 42):

![Figure 1] Partition of sentences by communicative dynamism (CD)

retrievable from context                                  irretrievable from context
less dynamic                                             more dynamic
what is talked about                                     what information is added

theme (Th)  transition (Tr)  rheme (Rh)

theme (Th)  transition (Tr)  rheme (Rh)

I have drawn two schemes above, those of tripartition and bipartition of a sentence by CD. Firbas’ predecessor in the Praguian School, Mathesius favored bipartition into theme and rheme.
In the literature, Firbas uses tripartition into theme, transition, and rheme and even more refined sexpartition\(^5\). This, however, does not mean Firbas’ abandonment and denial of bipartition. Tripartition and sexpartition are just refinements of bipartition. Firbas’ transition in tripartition is something that comes between theme and rheme and it belongs to the rheme when bipartite analysis is employed. I will not go further into the tripartite analysis but will stick to the bipartite analysis for simplicity (Minoura 2004: 42-43).

In some languages like Czech and Russian, FSP largely influences the word order. Roughly put, theme precedes rheme in an expressively unmodified sentence. Languages like Japanese and Korean have particles which mark theme: *wa* (Japanese), *nun* (Korean). On the other hand, English does not have a simple and straightforward means of expressing FSP. FSP is realized in English by word order, prosodic modification, definite/indefinite articles, cleft construction, pseudo-cleft construction, omission, etc. (Minoura 2004: 43).

From the above citation of Firbas’ writing the information conveyed by the theme seems to be always retrievable from the previous context. But this may not exactly match what is happening in actual languages. Various writers note that some information irretrievable from the previous context can act like theme. Hajičová (2002) has T (topic = theme), F (focus = rheme), and C (contrastive topic). Her C is not necessarily retrievable from the previously verbalized context. It is rather something chosen from a small set of choices, i.e. a small and closed system, like time (in the morning, at 6 o’clock, etc.)

In Japanese, both Hajičová’s T and C are marked by the particle *wa*. Kunihiro (2003), in his presentation, deliberately did not distinguish between the T and C in describing the function of the Japanese particle *wa*. He argued that the particle *wa* can be used when the matter is known from the context, be it verbal or non-verbal. The context in question can be classified as 1. perceptual context, i.e. temporal and spatial expanse perceivable at the time of the utterance, 2. conceptual context, i.e. already existing in the memory of a person like common knowledge, vocabulary\(^6\), previously verbalized information\(^7\), etc., and 3. abstract context, i.e. time, number, etc. He did not connect his findings to the argument of FSP in foreign countries. But in my humble opinion, his findings are relevant to the typological study of FSP from the viewpoint of general linguistics. His insight broadens the concept of known and retrievable from just something uttered in the immediate past to what is known and/or perceivable in a much broader sense (Minoura 2004:43-44).

It has, however, to be noted that it differs from a language to another in what manner
Hajičová’s C is treated. Some languages may lump C together with T (=Th); some with F (Rh); some even have a separate category for C (like in Malagasy, Minoura 2004: 48, ex. 15).

In a different context, Foley (2007 [1985]) argues that there are topic as opposed to comment and focus as opposed to presupposed. Below is one example from Foley (2007 [1985]: 407):

(2) Q: Where is the dot?
A: The dot is inside the circle

Foley keeps the topic-comment opposition and presupposed-focus opposition separated and does not merge them together. One needs to ask if the following supposition is true. At a quick glance, Foley’s topic seems to correspond to Mathesius’ and Firbas’ theme, whereas Foley’s comment seems to correspond to Mathesius’ and Firbas’ rheme in bipartition. So far it seems non-problematic. Foley seems to avoid it deliberately, but if you dare to merge the topic-comment partition and presupposed-focus partition together, the overlap between comment and presupposed seems to correspond to Firbas’ transition in tripartition, whereas Foley’s focus seems to correspond to Firbas’ rheme in tripartition. But probably the above idea of mine is problematic because Firbas’ tripartite rheme does not necessarily involve emphasis and the term focus by Foley suggests that it is related to Mathesius’ principle of emphasis. I will not further attempt to merge Firbas’ and Foley’s theories.

On the other hand, because of the necessity from description of TTM, I would like to add focus (F) to Mathesius’ and Firbas’ theme-rheme bipartition. The focus is inside the rheme in bipartition. Moreover, according to Mathesius’ enumeration of principles of word order, focus seems to belong to the principle of emphasis rather than to the principle of FSP. I would like to show it in a scheme:
<Figure 2> Theme, Rheme, and Focus

Focus is inside the rheme and is emphasized.
In the following section, I would like to demonstrate examples in which themes and focuses are manifested in TTM.

3. Examination of TTM data
I will argue that the theme is in some cases positionally marked in TTM namely by clause-initial placement of the constituent. I would not call it left dislocation because the term implies there is some kind of movement. More rarely a topic is marked by clause-final placement of the constituent. I would not call it right dislocation either because the term implies there is some kind of movement. I will call the topic marked by clause-final placement afterthought theme (ATH).

Focus (F) is in some cases positionally marked in TTM namely by clause-final placement of the constituent. (Focus is otherwise manifested in triplication of the sign. Triplication can be used for focus like in a rheme-only sentence MARINA MARINA MARINA (true true true, 2012 CONV, M Mbolatiana), but it can also be used for expression of an event occurring multiple times.) When both clause-final focus and clause-final afterthought theme are present, the focus comes before the afterthought theme.

<Figure 3> Theme, Focus, and Afterthought Theme in TTM

Figure 3 shows the clause-initial placement of theme, clause-final placement of focus and afterthought theme. When focus and afterthought theme are both present, focus comes before the afterthought theme.
Sign language linguists would ask, “What about non-manual markers (NMMs)?” I have isolated non-manual markers for polar question and for content question, but as for topicalization (= process of making a theme), it is hard to isolate NMMs which separate theme from the rest of the clause in TTM. Having more spontaneous signing materials (i.e. non-scripted signing and conversation) this year does not make it any easier. We need to wait for future investigation for the understanding of NMMs for theme etc.

3.1. Clause-initial theme

First, I would like to take a look at the themes placed initially in a clause.

(3) aho vita omaly, ianao zao m-an-ary
I finish yesterday, you now AV.PRES-VM-throw.away
IX₁ VITA OMALY, IX₂ ZAO MANARY
I finish yesterday, you now throw.away
Th Th

fako
garbage
FAKO
garbage
‘I did it yesterday; you throw the garbage away today’ (Minoura 2008: 50)

In this example, IX₁ (I) and IX₂ (you) are in contrast. Thus they are contrasted topics and they are placed in the beginning of each clause.

(4) io oh: m-anam+bola afaka m-an-ao
that if AV.PRES-VM-have+money free AV.PRES-VM-make
IX OHATRA MANANA VOLA AFAKA MANAO
that if have money free make
Th
trano be
house big
TRANO BE
house big
‘that person, if (s)he has money, (s)he can build a big house’ (Minoura 2010:205)

In the example above, a conditional clause OHATRA MANANA VOLA (if have money) comes between the theme IX (that) and the rest of the main clause. The separation of IX (that) from the rest of the main clause by the insertion of the conditional clause clearly suggests that the IX (that) is a theme.

(5) ala aho ho.any m-i-tsipona kitay
forest I to.there AV.PRES-VM-get kindle
ALA IX1 HO.ANY MITSIPONA KITAY
forest I to.there get kindle
Th
‘to the forest, I go in order to get kindles’ (2012)

If not for the clause-initial placement of the theme ALA (forest), the two signs, HO.ANY ALA (go to the forest) would be adjacent to each other and placed in this order, but because of the clause-initial placement of the theme, ALA (forest) is separate from HO.ANY (go there).

(6) maka+tahaka tsy.mety
take+like not.suitable
MAKA+TAHAKA TSY.METY
take+like not.suitable
Th
‘copying (somebody else’s speech) is a no-no’ (2012)

Not only a noun (phrase) but also a verb phrase MAKA+TAHAKA (take+like) can become a clause-initially placed theme. In this example, TSY.METY (not.suitable) perhaps is a focus.

(7) omaly aho maraina n-i-voaka n-i-vavaka
yesterday I morning AV.PST-VM-go.out AV.PST-VM-pray
OMALY  IX₁  MARAINA  MIVOAKA  MIVAVAKA
yesterday  I  morning  go.out  pray
Th  Th  (Th)
‘yesterday morning I went out (to church) to pray’ (2012)

In the example above, at least two constituents, OMALY (yesterday) and IX₁ (I) are themes. If MARAINA (morning) is also a theme, we end up with three themes placed in the beginning of a clause.

(8)  isak’  alina  izy  m-a-rary  nify
every  night  (s)he  AV.PRES-VM-sick  tooth
ALINA  ALINA  IX₁  MARARY  NIFY
night  night  (s)he  sick  tooth
Th  Th
‘every night (s)he has a toothache (lit.: his/her teeth are sick)’ (2012)

In the example above, ALINA ALINA (night night/every night) and IX₁ ((s)he) are both themes.

3.2. Clause-final focus

There are so many characteristics of TTM which are not shared by written Malagasy. This, the clause-final placement of focus, is the most foreign to written Malagasy in my humble opinion. And this is one proof that TTM is a separate language from written (and spoken) Malagasy. Many modal and other auxiliaries are focused and placed in the end of each clause. But this clause-final placement of modal auxiliaries is not brought about by Mathesius’ principle of grammatical function. This point is manifested by the fact that modal auxiliaries can also be placed in front of the lexical predicates.

(9)  lolo  saka  m-i-sambotra  azo
butterfly  cat  AV.PRES-VM-catch  can
LOLO  SAKA  MISAMBOTRA  AZO
butterfly  cat  catch  can
‘The cat can catch a butterfly’ (Minoura 2008: 60)

In the example above, the modal AZO (can) is focused and is placed at the end of the clause.

(10) m-am-orna  fotsiny  tena  tsia
AV.PRES-VM-invent  always  self  no
MAMORONA  FOTSINY  TENA  TSIA
invent  always  self  no
F

‘thinking up always by yourself is a no-no’ (Minoura 2012: 177)

In the example above, the negative and modal TSIA (no) is focused and is placed at the end of the clause.

(11) aotomobilina  m-i-taingina  foana  tsy.mety,
car  AV.PRES-VM-ride  always  not.suitable,
AOTOMOBILINA  MITAINGINA  FOANA  TSY.METY,
car  ride  always  not.suitable,
F

tsy  m-i-asa  hozatra
not  AV.PRES-VM-work  system
TSY  MIASA  HOZATRA
not  work  system
‘always riding a car is no good; your system does not get worked up’
(Minoura 2010:190)

In the example above, the negative and modal TSY.METY (not.suitable) is focused and is placed at the end of the clause.

(12) nama=ko  m-am-angy  matetika  tsy.misy
friend=my AV.PRES-VM-visit often not.be
NAMANA= GEN1 MAMANGY MATETIKA TSY.MISY
friend=my visit often not.be F

‘there are no friends of mine who visit me often’ (Minoura 2010:192)

In the example above, the negative existential TSY.MISY (not.be) is focused and is placed at the end of the clause.

(13) (nefa filoha Andry olana olana olana)
(but president Andry problem problem problem)
NEFA FILOHA ANDRY OLANA OLANA OLANA
but president Andry problem problem problem
F F F

‘but President Andry Rajoelina is nothing but problems’
(Minoura 2012: 169-170, M Mbolatiana, CONV)

In the above example from conversation, both the triplication and the clause-final placement show that the OLANA (problem) is truly a focus.

(14) (be.dia.be olona m-an-ao comandy)
(many person AV.PRES-VM-do order)
BE.DIA.BE OLONA MANAO COMANDY
many person do order
F(?)

comandy comandy ve?)
order order PQ?)
COMANDY COMANDY VE
order order PQ
F(?) F(?)

‘do many people place a lot of orders?’ (Minoura 2012: 167-168, M= Eva, CONV)
The example above may or may not belong to this section. But if it is NOT an example of sentence-final focus, it can be seen in contrast to the example (13). The triplication in (14) definitely marks the multiple occurrence of 'placing orders.' One cannot say definitively that the triplication of COMANDY (order) also marks focus.

3.3. Clause-initial theme and clause-final focus

Below are examples of clause-initial theme (3.1.) and clause-final focus (3.2.) coming together in a clause. Some examples in the sections 3.1. and 3.2. may perhaps better be classified in this section, but because of the lack of clues like NMMs, I will leave the examples in the original places.

(15) voatabia m-an-asa vita
    tomato AV.PRES-VM-wash finish
    VOATABIA MANASA VITA
    tomato wash finish
    Th      F

‘(I) finished washing tomatoes’ (2012)

In the example above, VOATABIA (tomato) seems to be a clause-initial theme and VITA (finish) seems to be a clause-final focus.

(16) lamba m-an-asa aho be.dia.be be.dia.be
    cloth AV.PRES-VM-wash I a.lot.of a.lot.of
    LAMBA MANASA IX1 BE.DIA.BE BE.DIA.BE
    cloth wash I a.lot.of a.lot.of
    Th      F      F

be.dia.be
a.lot.of
BE.DIA.BE
a.lot.of
F

‘I wash whole lot of cloths/clothes’ (Minoura 2008: 50)

In the example above, LAMBA (cloth) seems to be a clause-initial theme. BE.DIABE (a lot of) is definitely a focus having been placed sentence-finally and triplicated. The triplication may also emphasize the big amount of the cloths/clothes.

(17) alakamisy tsena toerana ao mahamasina
Thursday market place there Mahamasina
ALAKAMISY TSENA TOERANA IX MAHAMASINA
Thursday market place there Mahamasina
Th F F
‘on Thursdays, the place where the market takes place is Mahamasina’
(Minoura 2010: 199)

In the example above, ALAKAMISY (Thursday) seems to be a clause-initial theme, while IX MAHAMASINA (there in Mahamasina) seems to be a clause-final focus.

(18) ankizy tere-na m-a-tory tsia
child force-UV AV.PRES-VM-sleep no
ANKIZY TERENA MATORY TSIA
child be.forced sleep no
Th F
‘children should not be forced to go asleep’ (2012)

In the example above, ANKIZY (child) seems to be a clause-initial theme, while TSIA (no) seems to be a clause-final focus.

(19) izy vady vazaha
(s)he spouse foreigner
IX3 VADY VAZAH
(s)he spouse foreigner
‘as for her, her husband is a foreigner’ (2012 NSS)

This example showed up in Mme Eva’s non-scripted signing (NSS). IX: seems to be a clause-initial theme, while VAZAHA (foreigner) seems to be a clause-final focus.

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<th>vehivavy</th>
<th>marenina</th>
<th>be.dia.be,</th>
<th>oh</th>
<th></th>
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<td>woman</td>
<td>deaf</td>
<td>numerous,</td>
<td>about</td>
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<td>VEHIVAVY</td>
<td>MARENINA</td>
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<td>OHATRA</td>
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40 latsaka, m-a-zoto
40 little.less, AV.PRES-VM-diligently
40 LATSAKA, MAZOTO
40 little.less, diligently

m-i-vory
AV.PRES-VM-gather
MIVORY
gather
‘the deaf women are big in number, a little less than 40; they gather diligently’
(2012, Mme Eva, CONV)

This example showed up in the conversation between Mme Eva and M Mbolatiana. This was what Mme Eva said (= signed). VEHIVAVY MARENINA (woman deaf) seems to be a clause-initial theme, while BE.DIA.BE seems to be clause-final focus.

3.4. Clause-final afterthought theme

Themes are more often placed clause-initially, but there seem to be close-final themes too. I call the close-final themes afterthought themes.
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(21)  
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firy    ianao    ao    m-i-tondra    mofo?
how.many    you    there    AV.PRES-VM-bring    bread
FIRY    IX:    IX    MITONDRA    MOFO?
how.many    you    there    bring    bread
```

‘how many loaves of bread did you bring there?’ (Minoura 2008: 51)

A phrase FIRY MOFO (how many bread) seems to be separated and placed at the beginning and at the end of the clause. Content question (CQ) signs seem to be placed at various places in clauses (Minoura 2012: 175-176). Therefore sentence-initial placement of FIRY (how many) is not obligatory. Then the clause-final MOFO (bread) probably is an afterthought theme.

(22)  
```
volana    aogositra    ity    mbola    fotoana
month    August    this    still    time
VOLANA    AOGOSITRA    IX    MBOLA    FOTOANA
month    August    this    still    time
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```
m-an-gatsiaka,    m-an-ao    didimpoitra    sy
AV.PRES-VM-cold,    AV.PRES-VM-do    circumcision    and
MANGATSIKA,    MANAO    DIDIMPOITRA    SY
cold,    do    circumcision    and
famadihana;    fotoana    m-a-laza
turning.of.bones;    time    AV.PRES-VM-famous
FAMADIHANA;    FOTOANA    MALAZA
turning.of.bones;    time    famous
aty    Madagasikara    volona    aogositra
here    Madagascar    month    August
ATY    MADAGASIKARA    VOLANA    AOGOSITRA
here    Madagascar    month    August
```
A Th

‘in the month of August while it is still chilly, we do the circumcision and famadihana (turning of the bones); the month of August is the famous time here in Madagascar’ (2012)

The sentence above at least has two clauses. The first clause has a clause-initial theme VOLANA AOGOSITRA IX (this month of August), while the last clause has a clause-final afterthought theme VOLANA AOGOSITRA (the month of August). In this example, the afterthought theme seems to reinforce the ‘topicality’ of the ‘month of August.’

(23) mandre m-i-teny vava,
heary AV.PRES-VM-talk mouth,
MANDRE MITENY VAVA,
heary talk mouth,
Th

TSY AZO MARENINA
not get deaf

A Th

‘hearing people talk with their mouths; deaf people do not understand them’
(2012 NSS)

The sentence above has two clauses. The first clause has a clause-initial theme MANDRE (heary), while the second clause has a clause-final afterthought theme MARENINA (deaf). The MANDRE (heary) and the MARENINA (deaf) are contrasted to each other.

3.5. Clause-final focus plus afterthought theme in TTM

Below are a couple of examples with a focused near-clause-final modal auxiliary followed by an afterthought theme.

(24) m-i-karakara fitafiana m-a-hay izy
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In the example above, the focused modal MAHAY (can) is followed by an afterthought theme IX₃ ((s)he).

(25) m-a-saka tsara m-ila hena
    AV.PRES-VM-cooked good AV.PRES-need meat
    MASAKA TSARA MILA HENA
    becooked good need meat
    F ATh

‘the meat needs to be cooked well’ (2012)

In the example above, the focused modal MILA (need) is followed by an afterthought theme HENA (meat).

Conclusion

We have seen examples from TTM of (clause-initial) theme, (clause-final) focused rheme (=focus), and (clause-final) afterthought theme. We have also seen some combinations of them. Theme, non-focused rheme (i.e. the constituents other than the theme and the focused rheme), and focus are placed in that order. And the communicative dynamism (CD) increases also in that order. On the other hand, there are clauses with an afterthought theme placed at the end of the clause. Afterthought theme is ‘weak’ in communicative dynamism. These points are schematized below:
There was an example with more than one theme in a clause (example 7, which seems to have two or three themes). Therefore multiple themes are possible in a clause. On the other hand, when there is an afterthought theme, there does not seem to be a clause-initial theme, but is it a norm? Or can there possibly be both theme and afterthought theme in a clause? This question needs to be further looked into in the future.

Otherwise, non-manual markers (NMMs) for theme, (non-focused) rheme, focus, and afterthought theme need to be investigated in the future.

Moreover, at the end of the section 1, I wrote about possibilities of distinguishing between styles and/or registers in TTM. While recording M\textsuperscript{me} Eva’s and M Mbolatiana’s signing, I can feel fluctuation especially with M\textsuperscript{me} Eva as to styles and/or registers. E.g. a loanword from written/spoken Malagasy, i.e. the definite article NY (the) seems to appear in many of the sentences that M\textsuperscript{me} Eva gives in some hours. But on other occasions, M\textsuperscript{me} Eva does not give NY at all. NY does not seem to be an integral part of the ‘deafest’ TTM, but the Malagasy deaf people use the NY freely stepping over the boundaries between styles and registers. NY may not be an integral part of the ‘deafest’ TTM or the TTM proper, but when you include all the styles and all the registers that the Malagasy deaf people use, you cannot just ‘ignore’ it. If NY is a part of TTM at all, it seems to be a ‘theme-placement delayer,’ i.e. a theme preceded by a NY is not placed clause-initially like an ordinary theme, but it seems to be placed somewhere in the
middle of the clause or at the end of the clause. And the scheme of communicative dynamism given in figure 4 cannot be simply applied when NY is used. There seem to be some more particles which are used when the TTM nears written/spoken Malagasy. Not only particles but there may be other characteristics which pop up when the TTM nears written/spoken Malagasy.

Notes

1) The abbreviation used in this paper are: A (answer), ATh (afterthought theme), AV (actor voice), C (contrast topic), CD (communicative dynamism), CONV (conversation), F (focus), FSP (functional sentence perspective), IX (indexing), NMM (non-manual marker), NSS (non-scripted signing), PQ (polar question), PRES (present), Q (question), Rh (rheme), T (topic), Th (theme), Tr (transition), TTM (Tenin’ny Tanana Malagasy: Malagasy Sign Language), UV (undergoer voice), V (verb), VM (valence marker).

2) Many written Malagasy words were then mouthed when Mme Eva later signed. Mouthing means moving the mouth as if one is pronouncing the words orally, but it does not necessarily accompany audible and understandable speech sounds. But I did not make efforts to clearly mark which signs accompanied Malagasy mouthing and which signs did not do so. Of the five lines in the examples, the top two lines are Mme Eva’s efforts to write down TTM signs using written Malagasy words and their translation. They may not be too relevant to TTM except for some cases where e.g. tense marking which is totally lacking in TTM verbs is mouthed.

3) The labels of signs are written in all capitals.

4) “The principle of grammatical function manifests itself in that the sentence position of an element is determined by its syntactic functions. <…..> As for the principle of coherence of members, it manifests itself not only in a negative way, not permitting the insertion of another item between the two members, but also in a positive way, making the change in the position of one entail a change in the position of the other so that the two may remain contiguous (Firbas 1992:118, Minoura 2004: fn. 3).”

5) By sexpartition, Firbas distinguishes up to six parts, i.e. (from lower CD to higher CD) theme proper, theme (other than theme proper), transition proper, transition (other than transition proper), rheme (other than rheme proper), rheme proper (Firbas 1992, Minoura 2004: fn. 10).

6) Some parts of the vocabulary can form closed subsytems which can be treated as a context when something is retrieved in a speech act from the subsystem (Kunihiro 2003, Minoura 2004: fn. 12).

7) This is the “known” or “retrievable” information discussed everywhere else. Kunihiro’s “context” is a much broader notion than just previous utterances (Minoura 2004: fn. 13).

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マダガスカル手話のテーマ・レーマ・焦点

箕浦 信勝

本稿では、マダガスカル手話における、(節頭の)テーマ、(節末の)焦点、(節末の)思い出しテーマの例を見た。また、単一の節内でのそれらの組み合わせの例も見た。テーマ、焦点でないレーマ、焦点はその順序で現われる。またコミュニカティブ・ダイナミズム(CD)はその順番でだんだん大きくなる。一方、節によっては節末に思い出しテーマが置かれるものがある。思い出しテーマは、コミュニカティブ・ダイナミズムの点では弱い(小さい)。

節内に、1つ以上のテーマを持つ例があった。すなわち例7は2つないし3つの節頭のテーマを持っている。一方、節末の思い出しテーマのある例では、節頭のテーマが無いように見受けられた。しかし、これは規則としてそうなのかどうかはわからない。今後の考究が待たれる。

またテーマ、レーマ、焦点、思い出し焦点に関する非手指マーカー(NMM)も、今後観察される必要がある。

第1節の末尾においてはまた、マダガスカル手話における文体やレジスターの分別の可能性について書いた。マダム・エバの手話表現において、文体的あるいはレジスター的な揺れを感じられたからである。例えば、書記・音声マダガスカル語からの借用表現、定冠詞NYが、数時間にわたって頻出するときもあれば、全く見られない時もある。NYは「最も聴覚的な」マダガスカル手話の不可分な部分ではないのであろう。しかし、マダガスカルの聾者は、自在に文体やレジスターの境界を乗り越えて、NYを頻繁に使う時がある。もし、書記・音声マダガスカル語寄りの変種も含めてマダガスカル「の」手話を記述するのであれば、只単に、聾者のマダガスカル手話的ではないとして、NYを無視するわけには行かない。もし、NYがマダガスカル「の」手話の部分をなすとすれば、これは「テーマの出現を遅延させるもの」である。つまり、テーマが通常のテーマのように文頭には置かれず、もっと遅れて出現する。NYの他にも書記・音声マダガスカル語から「借用」された不変化詞がありそうである。また不変化詞の他にも、文体が書記・音声マダガスカル語に近寄ったときに現われる特徴がありそうである。