

PARAGRAPH ANALYSIS FOR AMATLAN ZAPOTEC

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1. INTRODUCTION

It appears that Amatlán Zapotec (AZ) narrative is always trying to teach something.¹ In folk tales, a person is left to draw his own conclusions, but often a story begs a conclusion. In a narration of a first hand experience, the author puts in his own evaluation as to what is important. This evaluation stage is the peak of the narrative, and is usually quite obvious.

This paper reports on a study of Zapotec narrative texts in the SIL Discourse Workshop, 1987. It identifies the characteristics of "well formed" narrative discourses as revealed in that study.

2. COMPONENTS OF A NARRATIVE DISCOURSE

The following structure for narrative discourse in AZ is shown in Figure 1. Notice the parallel structures of title and closing, setting and summary. Zapotec narrative discourse is well organized by the use of these parallel structures.

title
 setting
 body paragraphs
 ...(n Xs)..
 peak paragraph
 summary
closing

Figure 1

¹San Cristobal Amatlán is located in the district of Miahuatlán, Oaxaca. The Zapotec of Amatlán differs in some respects with that spoken in Cuixtla (Rueggsegger) and that spoken in San Juan Mixtepec (Reeck). The SIL Dialect Intelligibility Survey reports 40 percent intelligibility for the text from Cuixtla and 49 percent intelligibility for the text from Mixtepec (Egland 1978). There are about 5,000 speakers of AZ.

Narrative discourses in Amatlán Zapotec usually start with a title sentence, as in (1) and (2).

- (1) A story of a coyote and a fox. [REY1]
- (2) How Peter fooled a person. [SOFIA3]

A parallel structure to the title sentence in regards to its function, occurs finally in most AZ discourses. It is what I call the closing. It makes a final statement that that is how it was. The use of these two features "frames" the discourse.

- (3) Like this is this story. [MELESIO6]
- (4) That thing is the thing I said to you, brothers who are here. [MARTIN3]
- (5) That is exactly my story of the rain. [MELESIO2]

Following the title sentence, discourses in Amatlán Zapotec nearly always have several lines of general setting before getting into the real story. In longer discourses these can even be a couple of paragraphs in length. They give a preview of the entire discourse.

- (6) Both woodpeckers were happy. But later they both worked making their house. And there were many things for the woodpeckers to eat. [EZEQL8]
- (7) There was a time with John and Peter. John had a burro. [SOFIA3]

A parallel structure to the setting in regards to its function is the summary. It summarizes the entire discourse; it occurs following the peak paragraph and immediately before the closing. Summarization is an important feature of AZ narrative discourse. Each paragraph is summarized, as well as episodes within the discourse. Whole discourses are also summarized. The summary often includes an evaluation of the content of that unit. Summaries are used in all the narrative discourses examined, whether originally given orally or written. All the five authors used summaries.

- (8) Peter went with all the money that she had given to Peter. Peter never returned. [SOFIA3]
- (9) Therefore these are the things that I passed through. Therefore this is the story that I have told to you all. So those are the things that I passed through. Those are the answers to all the things I learned then, but not one of them served. I went there many years. [MELESIO6]

Nearly every narrative discourse has a peak paragraph. This paragraph occurs as the last of the body paragraphs, and before the summary and the closing.

3. COMPONENTS OF AN EPISODE

One of the texts studied [MELESIO6] has four episodes, each of which is summarized below. At times the episode summary is combined with the paragraph summary, and at times it is distinct. Note that all of Episode 1 is the setting for the entire discourse.

Episode 1. (This episode gives a general preview to what is going to be talked about later on in the discourse: about the author, Melesio, being connected with the church and his drinking problem. For the complete context you may refer to Appendix 1. The summary for this episode is as follows:)

- (10) Like this was how I passed (ie. what happened to me), those days when I was a musician.

Episode 2. (In this episode he talks about the drunkenness he went through, the problem of drunkenness and the church, and his turning to God who then removes the problem. The episode summary is as follows:)

- (11) Like this I left mezcal, I wasn't drinking very much mezcal.

Episode 3. (In this episode he talks about his working with the priest, the training he received, and about studying the Bible and the missal and comparing them. At the beginning of this episode he uses a sentence comparable to the title sentence at the beginning of a discourse.)

- (12) I was also in the church.
(The following is the summary for this episode:)

- (13) So I learned it.

Episode 4. (In this episode he gives his evaluation of all that he has presented. After the evaluation is a summary for the whole story, and no episode summary is found.)

- (14) Therefore these are the things that I passed through. Therefore this is the story that I have told to you all. So those are the things that I passed through. Those are the answers to all the things I learned then, but not one of them served. I went there many years. [MELESIO6]

4. PARAGRAPH BOUNDARIES

A paragraph has a discernible beginning and a ending. At the beginning of this study paragraph breaks were made subjectively according to unity of content. As specific markers of paragraph borders were identified in the course of the study, paragraph breaks were revised in a few instances.

4.1. PARAGRAPH BEGINNING. Paragraphs beginnings are signaled by a variety of features, either singly or in combination. The features include: use of the completive aspect instead of the more common habitual aspect, a time expression, a location expression, the use of a connecting particle, the naming of a participant, and the fronting of a participant. Only 4% of the paragraphs began with none of those features; such paragraph beginnings were identified by an immediately preceding summary, which marked the end of the previous paragraph. Table 1 presents the incidence of such markers in the texts studied.

Table 1: FREQUENCY OF PARAGRAPH MARKERS

total number of paragraphs: 26	
number of times the feature is used to signal a new paragraph:	
8	time expression
7	fronting of a participant
5	participant specified by a NP
19	connecting particles *
2	location expression
?	completive aspect
1	no signaling (Melesio6 line12)
number of times the feature is used to signal the end of a paragraph:	
19	summary
6	evaluation
3	no signaling (Sofia3 lines 7 & 26; Melesio6 line 33)
Those that have 3 or more initial signaling devices	
EZEQL9 line 7	(fronting, participant, time)
MELESIO6 line 44	(connector, fronting, participant) at episode break
MELESIO6 line 80	(location, time, connector)

* The large number here is due to the fact that these markers are often used when no other one is. And also they are frequently used elsewhere in the text.

ASPECT - A change in aspect occasionally signals the beginning of a new paragraph. The habitual aspect is the aspect that most often carries the event line. In the examples listed below, the completive aspect is used to indicate a new paragraph. The verb aspects in the preceding sentences are mostly in the habitual aspect.

(15) So the jay (C)heard the noise from the woodpecker's house. [EZEQL8]

(16) So I (C)went to the fiesta of Etna. [MELESIO6]

(17) So I (C)looked at it. [MELESIO6]

TIME EXPRESSION - A time expression, especially when preposed to the verb, often signals the beginning of a new paragraph, as in (18) through (20).

(18) Because now I studied as a cantor, as singing I the mass with the priest. [MELESIO6]

(19) Daily was I going to the priest, was going I. [MELESIO6]

(20) So went I to the fiesta of Etna, was it Friday the 5th. [MELESIO6]

LOCATION - A shift in location signals a new paragraph. This perhaps would have been more significant had a text on traveling been studied.

(21) So I went to the fiesta of Etna, it was Friday the fifth. [MELESIO6]

(22) So Peter went to the entrance of a person's house. [SOFIA3]

CONNECTING PARTICLES - Connecting particles are the most common signaling device used in beginning a new paragraph. But since they are common in all sentences, they are not as indicative of a new paragraph as otherwise it might seem.

(23) Because now I studied as a cantor, I was singing the mass with the priest. [MELESIO6]

(24) And I was beginning to drink mezcal. [MELESIO6]

(25) Therefore I thought, that now yes the words that Jesus spoke are true. (EZEQL9)

(26) So Peter said to John: [SOFIA3]

(27) So exactly precisely like that I left the mezcal, all at once I didn't drink mezcal. [MELESIO6]

NAMING A PARTICIPANT - This is either a new participant who is introduced, or an old participant who is now brought into focus. This participant may or may not be fronted into the focus position. In the following examples, the participant subjects are not fronted.

- (28) Three were the animals that I liked the most. [EZEQL9]
 (29) So heard the jay the noise from the woodpecker's house. [EZEQL8]
 (30) Daily I was going to the priest, I was going. [MELESIO6]

FRONTING - A new participant may be fronted into the focus position, or an old participant may be fronted in order to focus on him.

- (31) And (focus) another priest was coming, another priest was coming who was named Fred. [MELESIO6] <new participant>
 (32) Only the monkey made me think the most, when I saw it. [EZEQL9] <new participant>
 (33) So one woodpecker was singing, and one woodpecker was crying. [EZEQL8] <new participant>
 (34) (focus) the woodpecker was crying because he didn't have any children, none to hug, none to play with, therefore, the woodpecker was crying. [EZEQL8] <old participant>
 (35) When some months went by, (focus) the woodpecker already had two children. [EZEQL8] <old participant>

TIME - Referents to time most frequently mark the beginnings of new paragraphs in the texts studied. The time referent may be as simple as a single word, or as complex as a clause.

- (36) Daily I was going to the priest, I was going. [MELESIO6]
 (37) Always like that I was with him, everytime the priest would come, I was drunk, I was singing the mass. [MELESIO6]
 (38) Dawned the world another day, then Peter carried the burro skin in a box. [SOFIA3]

5.2. **PARAGRAPH FINAL CONSIDERATIONS.** The most distinctive feature signaling a paragraph occurs paragraph final. As is mentioned above, the paragraph ends with one or more sentences summarizing that paragraph. An alternative to the summary sentence and sometimes almost indistinguishable

from it, is an evaluation of some point in the paragraph. Examples of summaries and evaluations follow.

SUMMARY

- (39) So yes, the woodpeckers lived happily, because there were children and there were things for the woodpeckers to eat. [EZEQL8]
- (40) (focus) Peter went to discover and to know what they had eaten for dinner. [SOFIA3]
- (41) Like this I passed through those things, that day when I was a musician. [MELESIO6]

EVALUATION

- (42) Peter went with all the money that she gave to Peter. Never did Peter return. [SOFIA3]
- (43) I didn't know what to do. [MELESIO6]

COMBINATION

- (44) And it is (focus) an animal! <evaluation> And it loves it's wife and it loves it's children. <summary> And it is an animal! <evaluation>

5. PEAK

Every narrative has a peak which occurs as the last paragraph of the body of the discourse (see figure 1). It is marked by the following.

INCREASED USE OF FOCUS AND LOGICAL CONNECTOR PARTICLES. These are listed for the two stories that occur in the appendices. The first column of Table 2 gives a statistical analysis of the distribution of these particles.

- (45) from EZEQL8
leezha 'when', lee 'focus', zee 'so, then', zee si 'so yes!'
- (46) from MELESIO6
zee ta ca lee 'so exactly precisely focus', zee ta see lee 'so exactly like that focus', lee zee ta ca lee 'focus so exactly precisely focus', lee nal 'focus now', ya '¿?', nu nixa 'and nor', nu lee zee diaria 'and focus so daily', per axta zee ra 'but till then', nic tub 'not one', sbaa sa no mas 'only really like that no more', lee nal ya jamas 'focus now ¿? never'.

Table 2: PARTICLES PER CLAUSE & PERCENT OF HABITUAL ASPECT

% of initial particles per clause	paragraph	% not Habit. in main verbs	% of aspect change
	EZEQL8		
0	title	0	0
60	setting	25	40
36	problem	0	0
29	advise of jay	25	25
80	<u>problem resolved</u>	66	50
133	closing	66	33
	SOFIA3		
0	title	100	0
0	setting	50	50
25	plan	0	0
60	<u>preparation *</u>	66	66
18	action	20	30
25	twist	0	0
33	<u>discovery</u>	25	25
33	summary	50	50
	EZEQL9		
50	title	100	0
25	animals liked	0	0
45	monkey	63	45
100	<u>comparison</u>	71	43
50	summary	100	0
	MELESI06		
50	opening	100	0
25	preview of being a cantor	25	25
17	preview of drunkenness	30	60

28	problem of drunkenness	30	60
8	problem to the priest	0	0
45	drunkenness & church	7	14
38	turns to God	47	53

26	priest named Fred	25	28
33	attends courses	63	63
29	Bible	31	48
32	misal	54	38
50	compare	50	38

119	<u>evaluation of experience</u>	74	33
44	summary	40	20
100	closing	0	0

* This paragraph rates high in three of the signaling devices for the paragraph, but is not the peak semantically.

INCREASED USE OF THE COMPLETIVE ASPECT. The peak of the narrative is characterized by more verbs in the completive aspect and more flip-flopping of the aspects in the event line verbs (ie. the verbs of the main clauses). In (47) the event line verbs are underlined, and a letter indicating the aspect occurs after all the verbs.* The last two columns of Table 2 give a statistical analysis of the aspect markers.

(47)

17. Therefore did (C) I think, now yes were (C) true
the words that spoke (H) Jesus: "More easy enter (P) an
animal to God than a person."
18. But now yes did (C) I believe it because saw (C) I
the monkey loving (P) very much his wife and his
children.
19. And (focus) some people will fight (P) with their wives,
will fight (P) with their children.
20. And people are (S) they!
21. And (focus) animal is (S) it!
22. And loves (P) it it's wife and it's children more
than a person. [EZEQL9]

FRONTED SUBJECTS. Fronted subjects are more commonly used in the peak paragraph to drive home the point, even though they are not being used to signal new participants or to focus on known participants as in the other paragraphs. Examples can be found in the lines of the following text and they are underlined. Besides the examples listed below, please note their use in Appendix MELESIO6 lines 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 101, 105, 106.

(48)

20. (Focus) when went some months,
(focus) the woodpecker already had two children.
21. (Focus) when was met a year,
(focus) the woodpecker had four children.
22. Sotwo children were playing,
two children were crying.
23. So happened what both the woodpeckers asked for at first.
24. So yes, lived happily the woodpeckers,
because there were children,
and there were things to eat for the woodpeckers. [EZEQL8]

*The aspects of AZ verbs are: (H) habitual, (P) potential, (C) completive, (S) stative, (PR) progressive, and (F) future.

6. PROCEDURAL DISCOURSE

Nearly all of what was discussed above applies only to narrative discourse (1st person experiences and folktales). Now we turn to a brief discussion of procedural discourses.

The goal of a procedural discourse is to instruct step by step, the way in which something is done. Three procedural texts were examined. They were "How to make tortillas," "The way people used to get married," (See Appendix 3) and "How to plant and harvest."

The structure of a procedural discourse is not as complicated as narrative. The structure of a procedural discourse is presented below in figure 2.

title
body
closing
Figure 2

Unlike the narrative discourse, procedural discourses are not tightly knit. Paragraph boundaries are less distinct, even though there is some paragraph structure (this is discussed below). Also there is no peak paragraph. In other words, there is no main point that the author is trying to make.

The following features were found in the three procedural discourse studied. There was only one paragraph in the body of the discourse. The habitual aspect is used in 95% of all clauses. The connecting particles zee 'then, so' and nu zee 'and then' are very commonly used, and delineate the steps in the procedure.

Steps in the procedure, subparagraphs, may be marked by the word finishing followed by a dependent clause, and the word then followed by the independent clause. This feature may be a closure of a subparagraph.

(49)

And finishing putting she the water in the pot,
then puts she the pot on the fire. [SOFIA1]

The subparagraph may also be introduced by the word when followed by a dependent clause, and then the word then followed by the independent clause.

(50)

When is the boy 18 years old or more,
then looks he for a woman, that he likes. [POL10]

7. SUMMARY

Now to end this paper in a good Zapotec style: the summary. A well formed narrative discourse in AZ uses accompanying parallel structures at the margins of the body paragraphs. Summary is the most prominent feature of narrative discourse, and in a well formed discourse occurs on all upper levels: paragraph, episode, and complete discourse. There are signals that occur initially to indicate a new paragraph. In procedural discourse certain other structures indicate subparagraphs.

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