

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

6.0 Summary of findings

While there have been few discourse analysis studies done of Southeast Asian languages, especially in the Tibeto-Burman branch, e.g. Jirel, this study seeks to apply discourse level analysis to one Tibeto-Burman language, namely Lahu Si, in order to broaden the range of applied discourse studies in Southeast Asia. One oddity of discourse studies that Somsonge points out is that “most studies of narrative discourse have focused on languages with clearly marked tense-aspect systems” (Somsonge 1991:167). But the languages of Southeast Asia, and particularly the Tibeto-Burman languages, do not have tense-aspect systems. Thus, discourse analysis in Southeast Asian languages is needed in this geographical area. The goal of this thesis is to look broadly at several different aspects of discourse analysis.

The first chapter gives an introduction to the Lahu people: their geographic location, culture and language family. This chapter also includes a brief phonological sketch and grammar sketch. Since the focus of this study is discourse analysis, the phonology and grammar sketch are not exhaustive. Rather they summarize previous work, and they are minimally sufficient to provide a foundation for a meaningful discussion of discourse in the following chapters.

Chapter 2 discusses the framework for the discourse analysis applied procedures throughout the remaining chapters. The discourse analysis theory and methodology used and explained in this chapter are primarily Barnwell’s method of analyzing boundaries, Tuen van Dijk’s theory of macrostructures, Robert Longacre’s theory of notional and surface structure and mainline, and Robert Dooley and Stephen Levinsohn’s theory of participant reference. This chapter also introduces the four Lahu Si texts used throughout this thesis. Each of these texts are folk narratives which contain animals. A free translation of each of the texts is given as well as a macrostructure of each of the texts. A macrostructure is the global meaning of a

discourse (van Dijk 1977a). The macrostructures are derived by applying macrorules recursively to the texts, which are already reduced to storyline.

Chapter 3 organizes the texts into chunks or larger units of meaning with a focus on the notional structure and surface structure. Each of the texts are analyzed in this thesis to contain all the notional structure features proposed as universals by Longacre (1983a): Exposition, Inciting Incident, Developing Conflict, Climax, Denouement, and Conclusion, except for Final Suspense. This chapter also discusses the surface structure constituents, which correlate to the notional structure features. All the texts have Stage, Prepeak Episodes, Peak, Postpeak episodes, and Closure. Three of the 4 texts include the Title and the Aperture in the notional structure features. However none of the texts included in this study have a Finis.

Chapter 4 analyzes participant reference throughout the texts. The participant ranking, participant resources, and participant operations are given for each text individually, as well as applying Dooley and Levinsohn's (2001) method for analyzing participant reference for each of the texts. According to Dooley and Levinsohn's method, Lahu Si uses the follow default markers: when introducing a participant into the story a noun phrase is used (90%), in the S4 context or reintroducing a participant into the story a noun phrase is used (81%), in the S1 context or tracking a participant throughout the text a null reference is used (48%), in the S2 context or where the subject is the addressee of the previous speech act a noun phrase is used (94%), and in the S3 context or where the participant filling the subject role was involved in the previous sentence as a non-subject a noun phrase is used (60%).

Finally, chapter 5 examines the mainline of the four texts according to Longacre's theory of salience scheme. Each of the texts contain 5 salience bands: storyline, background, setting, irrealis, and cohesion. Of Longacre's proposed universal bands, these texts analyzed in this thesis do not contain routine (script predictable) events or variation between action and events, durative activities, and evaluation. Storyline band contains event verbs which move the story forward. The background band contains non-punctiliar event verbs. The setting band contains nonevent stative verbs

and descriptive material. The Irrealis band contains events that might or might not happen. Finally the cohesive band contains the connectors, which link each sentence to the next.

6.1 Evaluation

Macrostructures can really only be constructed after the salience scheme of a text is analyzed. However, after the salience is analyzed, the construction of the macrostructure analysis is smooth. It was beneficial to see the interaction between the two separate discourse methodologies (macrostructure and salience analysis) and how they complement one other.

Boundaries were simple to analyze and discuss because of their intuitive qualities. However the boundaries were confirmed as further analysis was conducted and the texts were analyzed.

While Longacre offers comprehensive guidelines for surface and notional structure analysis, surface and notional structure analysis seem to be a more subjective analysis, based largely on the analyst's perception. However, the texts analyzed here did provide evidence to support the surface and notional structure divisions that were found.

Participant reference analysis produced exactly what the literature predicted. Yet, having a better command of the analyzed language would have been beneficial, as Lahu Si often uses a null reference or changes the reference from the expected result. While the end result was as predicted in the literature, in each of the texts there seemed to be numerous exceptions to the default references which could not be explained. Either the analysis needs to be more flexible or this thesis did not cover enough text to come to clear conclusions about the apparent exceptions. Givón's notion of topic/participant used to determine participant ranking in a text proved to be insightful. Each of the texts analyzed in this thesis contained more than one main participant. By using Givón's method of measurements it was clear which participant was the most important to the story.

Saliency analysis differed somewhat from some of the literature in that particles were the main contributors to saliency markers instead of verb tenses. “The Male Water Buffalo Gives Birth” particularly did not follow the patterns displayed in the other texts, but rather seemed to follow its own rules, such as the use of *ced*. This interaction with particles was challenging yet insightful; challenging because particles are a vast, ambiguous topic and beyond the scope of this thesis but insightful to begin to crack the ice in the area of particles and discourse analysis. The analysis behind this thesis also started with two storyline bands: a primary storyline and a pivotal storyline. For some of the texts this seemed to aid the analysis and description of saliency bands and macrostructure, like “The Male Water Buffalo Gives Birth.” However, in other texts the use of two storyline bands restricted the development of macrostructures and did not seem to describe clearly how the text used saliency bands. Therefore, the use of two storyline bands were merged into one storyline band for the analysis in this thesis; however, in certain Lahu Si stories there could be the use of more storyline bands.

6.2 Further investigation

This thesis, while it does give a brief introduction to the grammar and phonology of Lahu Si, is not intended to be exhaustive. Thus there is room for a complete phonology or grammar of Lahu Si.

Each of the texts analyzed in this thesis are folk narratives specifically about or containing animals as participants. Because all of these texts make up a very specific genre, more research could be done in other areas, such as other narrative texts, like 1st or 2nd person narrative accounts, children’s stories, or other genres such as exhortation, procedure or exposition.

While all of the texts analyzed in this thesis are folk narratives about animals, there are distinct differences within them so much so that some of the texts could be categorized in a sub-genre of animal folk narratives. For example “The Male Water Buffalo Gives Birth” is the only text in which none of the animals in the story are personified. Thus, the story could be actual history or it could be historically

fictional. The remaining stories all have personified animals, which automatically transport the story out of reality to a nonrealistic arena where animals can talk, think and carry on as humans. Also among these three nonrealistic texts, "The Monkey Chops the Branch" is still slightly different. In this text the monkey is personified and he thinks and acts as a human. However, the monkey never talks, which could also make this text a sub-genre of the others. Because the monkey never converses with the human, the story could be factual, but the story could take place from the view of the monkey, which would account for the personification of the monkey. This only shows that the distinction between genres in Lahu Si texts is not clear and could account for differences between the discourse analysis of the texts. This certainly creates a broad area of genre analysis that still needs analysis.

As well as encompassing one narrow genre group, this thesis also is limited in the discourse features it discusses and examines. This thesis only looks at macrostructure, boundaries, surface and notional structure, participant reference and salience. There are many other discourse features that could be applied which have been left for further research, such as information structure, culture, particles, quote formula and many more. Because particles and quote formulas interact with various analyses, they should have a high priority in future analysis.

Another area of further research would be comparing the discourse features of Lahu Si with Southeast Asian areal discourse features since, as mentioned earlier, relatively little research has focused on the discourse features of Southeast Asian languages.