

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is the study of language beyond the sentence level; it is text-level grammar. It examines how texts are organized, and how the lower parts of the hierarchy relate to the higher parts. Some significant discourse features of Jirel folk narratives are discussed in this paper. More specifically, this research concentrates on examining discourse boundaries, surface structure, plot structure, and salience scheme of the storyline of these particular narratives.

1.1 The people and their land

The Jirel are one of the ethnic groups in Nepal having their own language, culture, costumes, etc. Regarding the clan division, Suman Krishna Jirel writes: "...the Jirel people have also classified themselves into 12 (twelve) major clans and 11 (eleven) sub-clans" (1992:2). Although a few Jirel live in southern districts of the country and in a few villages of Sindhupalchowk district of Bagmati zone, most Jirel live in the Eastern hills of Dolakha district of Janakpur zone. Jiri, the biggest area where Jirels live, is shown in capital letters in the map in Figure 1. Jirel are predominantly animists. Agriculture is their primary livelihood.

Regarding the Jirel population, Suman Krishna Jirel (1992:17) has written, "...the Jirel's population [numbered] about 3000 at the time of the national census in 1961

AD,...but now it is believed to reach about 15,000.” According to Grimes (1996:727), the Jirel population is about 5,000. The writer believes that the Jirel speakers probably number somewhere between 8,000 to 10,000.

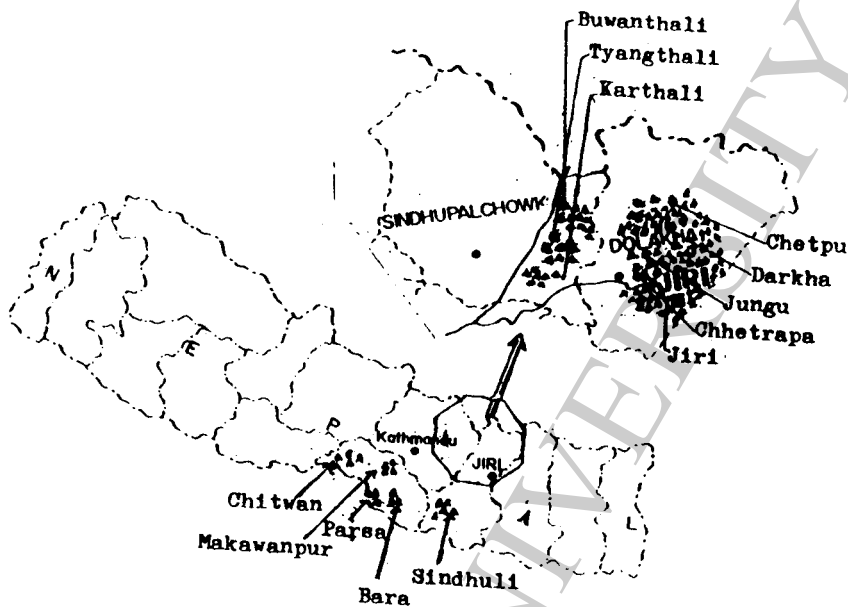


Figure 1. Distribution of Jirel population (Reproduced from Jirel (1992:18))

1.2 Classification of the language

The language of the texts used in this thesis is usually referred to as Jirel. Dialectal differences in this language do not affect mutual intelligibility. The texts used for the thesis are based on the dialect of speakers from the village of Jiri Yarsa.

The Jirel language belongs to the Tibeto-Burman language family and has four tones¹. It is a subject object verb (SOV) language, and an independent verb always comes at the end of a sentence. The occurrence of a string of consecutive action verbs is not unusual in Jirel. An example of a string of consecutive action verbs is seen in “JACKAL” S#89, where ...*the-la*² *jum-gin*⁴ *kher-gin*³ *cay-kin*³ *yangrang*² *ta-kin*¹ *du-kin*² *set-tuk-lo*¹ can be glossed as ‘catching (him), taking (him) away and tying him up again (the people of the village) killed him by beating.’ In this example all the verbs *jum-gin*⁴ *kher-gin*³ *cay-kin*³ ...*ta-kin*¹ *du-kin*²... ‘catching (him), taking (him) away, tying him up and beating’ which have occurred before the main independent verb *set-tuk-lo*¹ ‘killed’ are a string of consecutive action verbs.

In his language classification tree, Bishnu S. Rai (1995:29) has put Jirel with Newari, Sunuwar, Sherpa, etc. which belong to the Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal. In the same way, Warren William Glover (1974:13) has put Jirel under the Tibetan family.

¹ See section 1.4 for a phonology description.

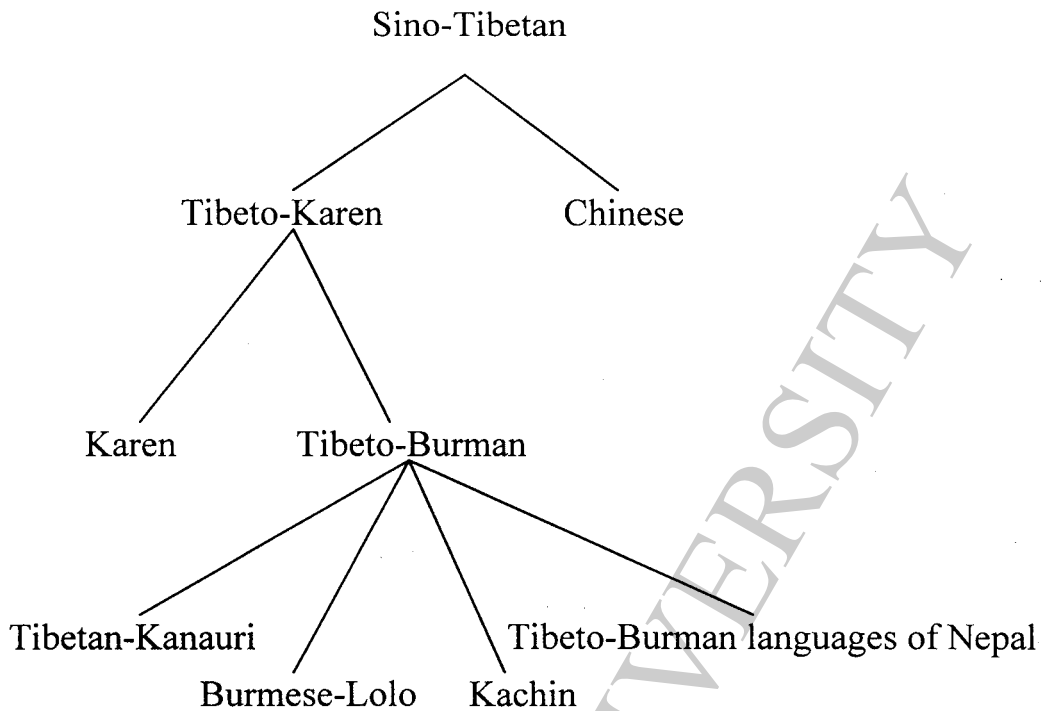


Figure 2. Jirel in relationship to some other Tibeto-Burman languages

Regarding the Tibeto-Burman languages, Austin Hale (1982:10) states:

Tibeto-Burman is generally regarded as a subfamily of Sino-Tibetan, though there have been those who doubt this classification...Tibeto-Burman is coordinate with Karen within a grouping labeled "Tibeto-Karen", and Chinese and Tibeto-Karen are in turn coordinate members of Sino-Tibetan.

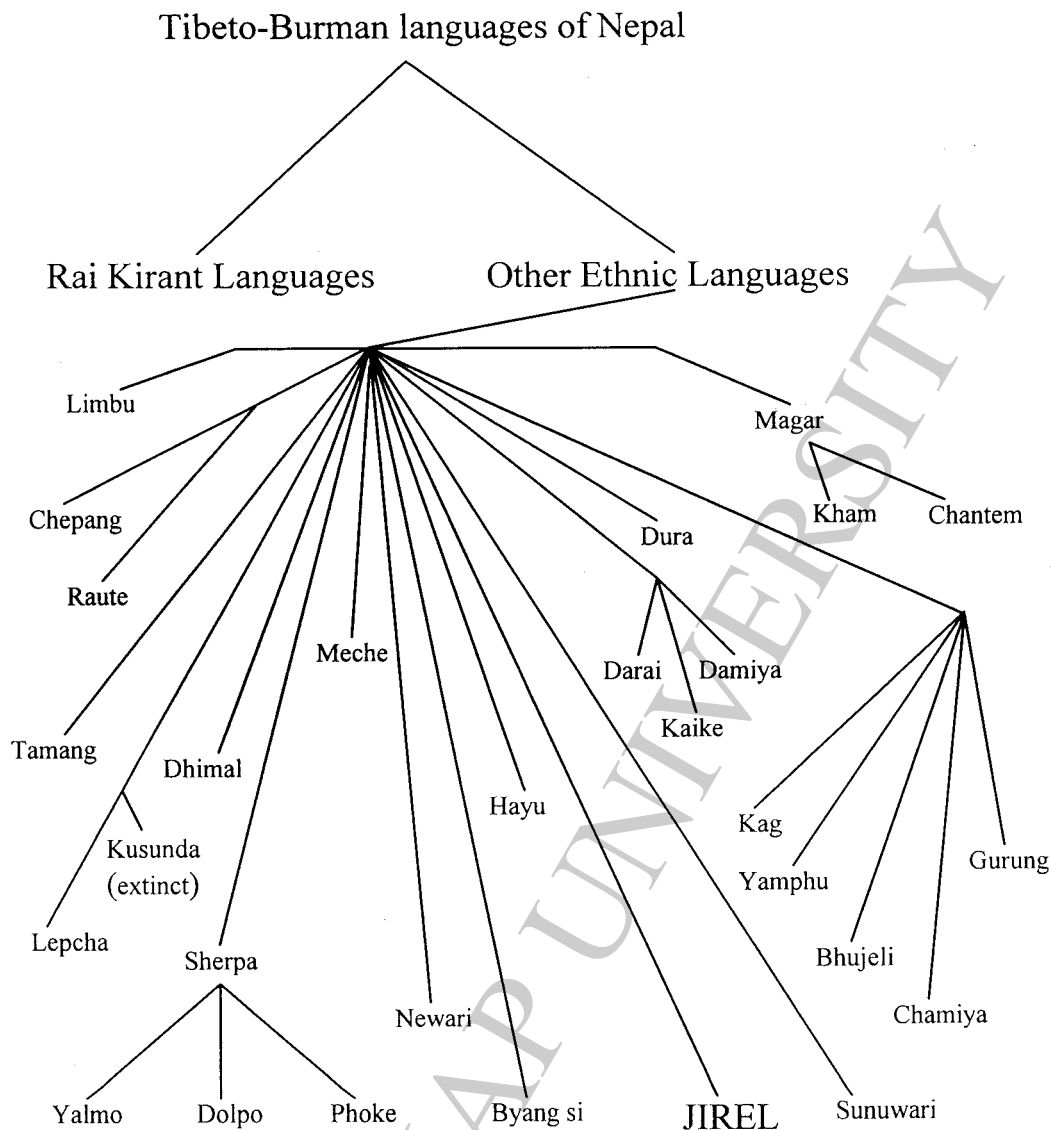


Figure 3. Jirel among other Tibeto-Burman languages (With modification from Rai (1995:29))

1.3 Previous linguistic work on Jirel

Except for a few languages (like Maithili, Newari, Limbu, etc.), most of the vernacular/minority languages in Nepal were seldom written down or given

recognition, though the situation is being changed as the country's current language policy promotes the preservation of its different cultures and languages. Nepali, the official national language as well as the language of literature, schooling, mass media, etc., is used as a means of communication among those who do not understand each others' regional languages. The minority languages were almost always ignored. Jirel is one of those languages.

Although the name of the Jirel language is mentioned by a few different writers and linguists (Bista 1972; Hale 1973a & b; Matisoff et al 1996), most of the works published on Jirel are written by Esther Strahm and Anita Maibaum. Some of the works are published both in Jirel and English, and some are still to come. Maibaum (1978:203-207) and Strahm (1978:342-348) have written articles on "Participants in Jirel narratives" and "Cohesion markers in Jirel narrative", respectively. These same people have worked on Jirel phonology (1971; 1997), Jirel clause patterns (1975), and Jirel text structure (published in Hale 1973a).

In their Jirel phonemic summary, Strahm and Maibaum (1971:1) state, "An initial survey by Mr. C. M. Bandhu of the Department of Nepali, Tribhuvan University, is to our knowledge the only study of Jirel which precedes this present investigation."

1.4 Explanation of transcription

The following chart is a summary of the transcription adopted from Strahm and Maibaum (1971, 1997) and used in this thesis:

	Bilabial	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops						
voiceless unaspirated	p	t	T		k	
voiceless aspirated	ph	th	Th		kh	
voiced	b	d	D		g	
Affricates						
voiceless unaspirated			c	cy		
voiceless aspirated			ch	chy		
voiced			j	jy		
Nasals voiced	m	n		ny	ng	
Fricatives			s	sy		h
Laterals voiced			l			
voiceless			lh			
Flaps voiced			r			
voiceless			rh			
Approximants voiced	w			y		

Table 1. Phonemic chart of consonants

This transcription chart differs slightly from Strahm and Maibaum (1971, 1997). For example, the affricates *c*, *ch*, *j* are classified as alveolar affricates in this transcription whereas Strahm and Maibaum have treated them as dental/palatal affricates. In the same way, they have classified the fricative *sy* as an alveo-palatal whereas it is palatal fricative in this chart. They (1971:35) further state, “All consonants can occur in syllable-initial position. Unaspirated voiceless stops, nasals and /l/ and /r/ can occur in syllable-final position. Aspiration is limited to the voiceless stops and affricates and /l/ and /r/. As a separate phoneme, /h/ is very rare.”

The Roman transcription of the Jirel texts and examples in this thesis do not differentiate between long and short vowels as vowel length in Jirel is only marginally contrastive and almost always predictable by rules. The Roman transcription and the vowel chart correspond to the transcription and vowel chart used in a forthcoming Jirel-Nepali-English Dictionary by Strahm and Maibaum². Thus this chart differs from the one given in the Jirel Phonemic Summary of 1971 by Strahm and Maibaum where vowel length in Jirel is viewed as being contrastive.

In text and examples, *a* is phonetically a low-open, front-central unrounded vowel. The phonetically low-open, central, or even central-back unrounded vowel is represented as *A*. In Jirel, *A* is very rare and is a variant of *a*. However, as it can only be predicted by knowing the appropriate rule, it is transcribed by *A* in this thesis. In Nepali loan words this low-open, central unrounded vowel occurs frequently and is a contrastive vowel³. The following is the phonemic summary chart of Jirel vowels:

Front Unrounded	Central Unrounded	Back Rounded
i		u
e		o
	a	

Table 2. Phonemic chart of vowels

In texts, capital N is written after the vowel to mark nasalization on the preceding vowel. In similar way, the superscript numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 are used to mark tones.

² Information obtained through personal communication.

³ In this thesis, there are not many examples of Nepali loan words with this vowel though.

The two high tones carry numbers 1 and 3, the two low tones the numbers 2 and 4. There are no vowel clusters within a syllable. Vowels occurring contiguously represent two nuclei with a syllable break between. Long vowels and nasal vowels occur only in open word-initial syllables (Strahm and Maibaum 1971:57).

The preferred syllable types in Jirel are CV and CVC, the V representing the syllable nucleus (Strahm and Maibaum 1971:58). They present a four contrastive syllable pattern in Jirel as shown in Table 3.

V	CV	VC	CVC
aba ⁴ 'father'	su ¹ 'who'	anggorok ³ 'blouse'	lam ⁴ 'path'
oko ¹ 'chin'	numu ⁴ 'younger sister'	phe-ong ⁴ 'mice-too'	cyen ¹ 'tiger'

Table 3. Four contrastive syllable patterns in Jirel

Describing the Jirel tones, Strahm and Maibaum (1971:66) write:

The main domain of tone in Jirel is the phonological word. A word may consist of one or more syllables or one or more morphemes. It is the realm of a correlation of pitch and contour. In the basic tone pattern, the characteristic pitch level is confined to the initial syllable of the word, the contour spreads over the whole word.

They mention four contrasting tone types in Jirel as shown in Table 4⁴.

Tone numbers	Description	Examples
1	High level non-falling	chyimpak ¹ 'liver'
2	Low level rising	chyirbuk ² 'chicks'
3	High level falling	nyima ³ 'ear of grain'
4	Low level falling	nyima ⁴ 'sun' or 'day'

Table 4. Four contrastive tones in Jirel

1.5 The data and its limitations

The data for this thesis research was collected during April and May of 1997 in the writer's home country. Although the writer himself is a mother tongue speaker of Jirel, he collected the data from his brother, who had previously helped Strahm and Maibaum in their research. The data was first recorded on tape and then transcribed by using the Roman alphabet. The spellings used are in the phonemic script described above. Then the data was further analyzed using the SIL Linguist's Shoebox database program to look up the English glosses and parts of speech. The writer decided to transcribe in the Roman script rather than the IPA fonts because the previously published works of Strahm and Maibaum have employed a similar alphabet. Thus the writer's present arrangement will be easy to follow for those who also refer to the former Jirel works.

⁴ The phonemic patterns given here have transparent manifestations in unaffixed monosyllabic and disyllabic words. In trisyllabic words and in affixed words in general, the phonetic manifestations of these tone patterns are modified according to rules, the description of which goes beyond the scope of this paper. The writer is responsible for any errors on tones that might be found in this thesis. For an account see Strahm and Maibaum (1971).

1.6 Brief introduction to the thesis texts

There are four texts analyzed for the thesis. The “CAT” and “JACKAL” texts have also appeared in Strahm and Maibaum’s work in Hale (1973a:183-188, 190-201) but with slightly different versions although the narrator was the same person. The writer assumes the text was changed because the narrator was telling these texts to different audiences: Strahm and Maibaum as non-native speakers, and the writer a native speaker. The texts, with their summary, are as follows:

Text 1 KALE: This text does not have a title in Jirel. It is referred to as “KALE” in the analysis. It is a text with all human participants and seems to be told with an intention of teaching a moral. In this text, there is a boy named Kale who tells his friends that he is from a noble family and always enjoys having sumptuous food. Since he keeps on boasting, one day one of his friends gets angry with him and goes secretly to Kale’s home to check on the matter. There the friend sees Kale eating very ordinary food. So, the friend comes back to his other friends and plans to show Kale to be wrong. In this they succeed. And the text ends with a moral, saying, “This is what happens to the one who boasts or tells a lie. The truth will be revealed one day.”

Text 2 CAT: This text has a title in Jirel. In Jirel it reads “Story of mice and (a) cat”. It is referred to as “CAT” in the analysis. It is a text with all animal participants and seems to be told to explain why cats eat mice. According to the text, many mice have been living at a deserted house. Suddenly a cat arrives at the house and starts eating

up mice one by one. One day, the mice find out what the cat has been doing to them and ask it to stop. The cat agrees to their request but does not keep its promise. The mice plan to tie a bell around the cat's neck, but they do not succeed. As a result, the cat eats up all the mice in that house. This narrative ends with a saying or explanation, "Because the mice could not find any solution to escape from the cat in the past, cats catch and eat mice in this manner."

Text 3 JACKAL: This text has a title in Jirel. In Jirel it reads "Story of (an) old jackal". It is referred to as "JACKAL" in the analysis. This is a text with both human and animal participants. It seems to be told to entertain. In this text, there is an old jackal that feeds on chicken by fooling villagers until the day the villagers find out about the problem through an educated man. From the arrival of the educated man, a plan of catching the jackal and punishing him begins. Because the jackal is so cunning, after the first time he is captured he escapes. The villagers succeed in getting rid of him only upon capturing him a second time, which is made possible by god Mahadeva and his wife Parbati.

Text 4 DEER : This text has a title in Jirel. In Jirel it reads "This is (a) story of (a) jackal, (a) deer and (a) crow". It is referred to as "DEER" in the analysis. This story has human and animal participants and seems to be told to teach a moral of not betraying one's fellowman. This is a story of three animals, who agree to become friends and help each other in time of need. But one of them, the jackal, tries to betray

one of its friends, the deer. With the help of its other true friend, the crow, the deer survives. Ultimately the jackal gets killed and the crow and the deer live once again as true friends. Like “KALE” text, this text ends with a moral, “The fate of the person will be like this (like the jackal’s) if someone tries to betray the person trusting in him.”

1.7 Organization of thesis

These topics were chosen to study some selected discourse features of Jirel folk narratives. After a general introduction to the thesis in chapter one, the analysis of the chosen topics will begin from chapter two, which discusses different discourse boundaries dividing texts in bigger chunks or units. These units are not only marked by different markers, but they have meaning and relation of their own. For example, they indicate a discourse’s different parts—their beginnings and/or ends. To study the meaning and the relation of these units, study of surface structure is needed. This will be discussed in chapter three. As chapter three is only a surface or formal division of a text, it cannot tell what really is occurring in texts unless plot structure is studied. So, chapter four is needed to study the structure of the meaning beyond the surface structure. These different units or paragraphs are not of the same value or importance in the plot structure. Some of the units’ contents are more important than its other parts. For example, the introductory and closing parts of a text may differ from the climax part of the text because of its different formal and grammatical features.

Therefore, the same units, according to their importance, will be further analyzed with the help of different salience bands in chapter five. By summarizing the discussion and/or pointing out a need of further study in some of the areas which were analyzed, chapter six will conclude the thesis.

It is felt that although these are not all the possible topics of study within discourse analysis, they do present a logical unit whose study will yield significant insight into Jirel narratives.

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