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**Functions of verbal constructions in Looma narratives:  
a case of the Guinean dialects**

Grammatical systems of the languages in the West-African area are sometimes called discourse-oriented because of the importance of discursive rules determining the use of their grammatical markers [Contini-Morava 1989, Blass 1990, Plungian 2004]. I will consider specificity of use of verbal constructions expressing TAM-categories in the Looma language (Mande < Niger-Congo). The analyzed corpus of texts in Guinean dialects includes the narratives collected during my fieldwork with a Woi-Bhalaga speaker and the texts appended to the works on Koima [Wilhoit 1999] and Lulama [Prost 1967] dialects.

The main discourse function of the grammatical means in any language is to demarcate different functional fragments, or passages, of the narrative [Plungian 2008: 17], first of all, the sequential, or consecutive, and background. I argue that tense-aspect-switching allows emphasizing of the fragment's significance. Thus, generally neutral construction appears in the non-first clause and all its TAM-characteristics are determined by the construction of the first clause:

- (1) *Gè*                    *kótí*                    *zéyé-ní*                    *gè*                    *pílí*                    *káálí*                    *má.*  
 1SG.BASE            REF\stone.DEF    take-AOR            1SG.BASE            3SG.PI\jump        REF\snake.DEF    on  
 'I picked up a stone and threw it at the snake'.

Nevertheless, the analysis of the texts shows that the order of marked for TAM-categories and the neutral constructions is arbitrary. Therefore it is the interchange of the neutral and marked constructions within the text that is relevant for the organization of the narrative, which allows marking of the key moments of the narrative.

The choice of the construction depends on the fragment of the narrative where it is used. For example, the consecutive chain is formed by the neutral or simultaneous construction, while the background passage is formed by non-finite verbal forms in the dependent clauses or imperfect constructions. Moreover, the meaning of the construction itself may depend on the passage. Thus, in the consecutive passage, the aorist construction expresses completed actions (1). In the background passage, it is usually stative verbs that are used in the construction. In this case, it acquires imperfective meaning:

- (2) *Tí*                    *zéy-ní* *gúlú-y*                    *zù*                    *dóbó-y*                    *zù,*                    *tí*                    *dá*  
 3PL.BASE            sit-AOR REF\tree-DEF    in                    REF\forest-DEF    in                    3PL.BASE            JNT

*gúyé*                    *ló.*  
 REF\song            fall

'They (birds) were sitting on the tree in the forest and singing the songs'.

A typologically widespread strategy is to replace Past forms with Present forms ("praesens historicum") in order to emphasize key episodes [Fleischman 1990]. In Looma, three different verbal constructions referring to the present are used for this purpose. In my presentation I will demonstrate the differences in their use depending on the specific target.

Finally, I argue that the use of the verbal constructions depends on the regime of the interpretation, conversational or narrative [Benveniste 1959]. The analysis of the direct speech in the narratives shows that the neutral construction in the independent clause under the conversational interpretation has intentional meaning, while under the narrative interpretation it refers to the past. Conversationally, the actions in the past are usually expressed by the perfect or resultative constructions. Under the narrative interpretation, the aorist construction which has no connection to the actual situation prevails.

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