

Extended Functions of the Northern Pwo Karen Medial Demonstrative

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In Northern Pwo Karen (N. Pwo), a Tibeto-Burman language of Thailand, demonstratives show evidence of semantic extension from markers of spatial deixis to the marking of entities and propositions in discourse as a means of establishing joint attention (Diessel 2006). This is especially true for the medial demonstrative *nɔ*.

The marking of fronted topic-introducing phrases is one way in which *nɔ* establishes joint attention. This is illustrated by the sequence of clauses in (1) and (2).

- (1) Folktale 55.86
kətəháng nɔ Ø mɛ̌ phlɔ́ng lə nā bɛ
 elephant DEM 3:SUBJ do person NEG win NEG
 'As for elephants, (they) do not win against humans.'
- (2) Folktale 55.87
 phlɔ́ng ʔo wé ʔə khu tɛ̀ wé Ø mɛ̌ thə kú' ʔə mɛ̌ng
 people exist 3:OBJ 3:POSS head use 3:OBJ 3:SUBJ do thing every 3:POSS CL:kind
 'People exist on their heads and use them (elephants) to do things of every kind.'

In (1), the discourse topic is set by the fronted noun phrase *kətəháng nɔ* '(as for) elephants'. Elephants are also the elided subject of the following clause. In (2), *phlɔ́ng* 'people' is the subject of the matrix clause, while the elided subject of the dependent clause is 'elephants'. However, throughout this stretch of discourse, the focus of attention is on elephants, not humans.

The medial demonstrative also marks conditional clauses, as in (3).

- (3) Folktale 4.129
 nə me' lə lɪ bɛ nɔ tɛə mə klāng sɪng nɛ̌ tɛ̌ tɛ̌ lɔ̌
 2:SUBJ be NEG go NEG DEM 1:SUBJ IRR slash die 2:OBJ surely surely EMPH
 "If you don't go, I will slash and kill you for sure!"

The conditional clause *nə me' lə lɪ bɛ nɔ* 'if you don't go' is formed with the copular element *me'* 'be' which precedes an intransitive predicate *lə lɪ bɛ* 'do not go' with *nɔ* as the final element.

Cross-linguistically, topic-setting constructions and conditionals are often marked by the same marker. Because of this, Haiman (1978) concluded that conditionals are topics, commenting that "a conditional clause is...a part of the knowledge shared by the speaker and his listener. As such, it constitutes the framework which has been selected for the following discourse (Haiman 1978:583)." Subsequent research has refined this conclusion. Werth (1997:251) suggests that conditionals "take some situation and hold it up for inspection" and Tabakowska (1997:282) proposes that "topicalizing constructions differ semantically from conditionals in that they do not create a search domain as a mental space, but rather invite the hearer to pick one that the speaker and the hearer are assumed to share already." The extended functions of the N. Pwo medial demonstrative accord well with these observations. Topic-introducing constructions pinpoint a shared mental space while conditional clauses focus the attention on a situation which serves as the framework for the following discourse.

In addition to fronted topics and conditionals, *nɔ* can also mark time adverbials and final statements of the prevailing situation. This paper adds to the inventory of possible grammaticalization patterns for demonstratives as markers of elements of joint attention in discourse. It also contributes to the linguistic record of an under-documented language.

References

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