



HAL
open science

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

Daria Mishchenko

► **To cite this version:**

Daria Mishchenko. Functions of verbal constructions in Looma narratives: a case of the Guinean dialects. The 46th Annual meeting of the SLE, Sep 2013, Split, Croatia. pp.249-250. halshs-00865960

HAL Id: halshs-00865960

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-00865960>

Submitted on 30 Sep 2013

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

**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.

References

- Benveniste, E. 1959. Les relations de temps dans le verbe français // Bull. de la Société de linguistique de Paris 54, 69-82.
 Blass, R. 1990. Relevance Relations in Discourse: A Study with Special Reference to Sissala. Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press.
 Contini-Morava, E. 1989. Discourse Pragmatics and Semantic Categorization: The Case of Negation and Tense-Aspect with Special Reference to Swahili. B.: MdG.
 Fleischman, S. 1990. Tense and Narrativity: From Medieval Performance to Modern Fiction. Austin: University of Texas.

- Hopper, P. 1979. Aspect and foregrounding in discourse // T. Givón (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics 12: Discourse and Syntax*. New York: Academic press, 213-241.
- Plungian, V. A. 2004. On the discourse description of aspect markers // A. P. Volodin (ed.). *Typological explanations in grammar: On the 70th anniversary of Pr. V.S. Khrakovsky*. Moscow: Znak, 390-412 [in Russian].
- Plungian, V. A. 2008. Introduction: Discourse and Grammar // *Studies in the Theory of Grammar. Issue 4: Grammatical Categories in Discourse* / V. Gusev, V. Plungian, A. Urmanchieva (eds.). Moscow: Gnosis, 7-34.
- Prost, A. 1967. *La langue Loghɔma. Esquisse grammaticale suivie de textes et d'un glossaire*. Université de Dakar, Documents linguistiques, 13.
- Wilhoit, L. K. 1999. *A Principles and Parameters Approach to Loma Grammar*. Ph. D. Dissertation. The University of Texas at Arlington.