Contextualizing Cues in Haida Narrative

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Introduction

Verbal strategies and efforts to analyze them interpretively and sociolinguistically have been topics of a number of recent works (e.g., the two recent volumes written and edited respectively by Gumperz as part of a series of Studies in International Sociolinguistics (1982)). Underlying this work is a recognition that context and the language user's sociocultural presuppositions "play a key role in interpretive processes" (Gumperz, 1982:205). The idea is that in order to intend, we need to use our knowledge of the world. In conversation we need to both intend and comprehend. Our problem here, as Gumperz puts it, "is not simply one of making sense of a given chunk of discourse". Instead,

What is to be interpreted must first be created through interaction, before interpretation can begin, and to that end speakers must enlist others' cooperation and actively seek to create conversational involvement." (Gumperz, 1982:206)

Conversation is just one style of speaking, one type of discourse task. In a conversational mode there is turn-taking which allows for interactive checking for the speaker's intention. With narrative, where what is to be comprehended is first created by the narrator interacting with an audience, interpretation must enlist audience cooperation as well and actively seek to create what may be called 'narrative involvement'. This one--many speech style as opposed to the one--one conversational mode involves discourse strategies of a different form. In this mode, 'checking' for the speaker's intention is of a different sort. Research in recent years on narrative has tended to focus on structure (Hymes, 1981; Givon ed., 1983), or on the interpretation of content (as given impetus by the anthropologizing of hermeneutics in works such as those of e.g., Ricoeur, 1981). The Hymes (1981) approach sees narrative structure in its sociocultural context, interpreting the text through linguistic, cultural and personal dimensions. In this paper we seek to isolate structural devices in Haida narrative that narrators use to involve the audience and enlist its cooperation. Our interest is in the way narrative structures the performance context rather than how it structures itself.

We are concerned with how narrators assist audiences in their comprehension task. In contrast, some studies have looked at how the audiences let the narrators know that they are being attended and with what effect. Eastman (1983) described certain exclamations in Swahili as pragmatic parts of speech used to keep a narrative going. Silberstein (1983) has looked at how narrators build the texts of their narrative using various discourse strategies. In our work with Haida, we have looked at oral folk narrative (e.g., the legend "qaao qaao" discussed in Edwards and Eastman, 1983), conversation (Edwards, 1983), and recently we have examined historical narrative, personal narrative, and biblical (translation) narrative. In each case the audience was composed of both of us and up to three native speakers of Haida. Certain common devices emerged that crosscut narrative in whatever form. These are what we will describe here as devices used by the narrator to insure audience comprehension of text structure. In our paper on conjunction in Haida (1982), we looked at how various grammatical devices and morphological particles link different clauses, phrases, and words. Here we will see that there are other conjunctions used above the sentence level that are involved in signalling to the audience where the narrator is in terms of sequencing of events or plot development. Such conventions when used in conversation are referred to by Gumperz (1982, Chapter 6) as contextualizing cues.

Audience Involvement Devices

When telling traditional stories, narrators make sure their audiences are clearly informed that the narrative is over. In formal story telling, narrators also see that audiences are informed that a legend or historical tale is about to begin. There are also different connectives used in narrative that link whole segments and relate them to each other. In our paper for this conference last year, we pointed out that, in the narrative being looked at here, lexical formatives entered into increasingly complex forms
as the narrative moved along. This is a form of what we mean here by audience involving on the part of the narrator such that, once the audience gets a sentence's meaning for example, the fun comes later in seeing what happens to the whole sentence as what it says is progressively referred to by shorter phrases and ultimately often single words. The audience is to listen for such transformations of sentences into single words, or for roots to have their referential meaning changed, or for roots to be combined in novel ways after first being used separately.

Striking to us, too, in a number of our texts, was the use of negative sentences or negated nominals prior to the formal closing and thanking elements of a narrative. Each narrative form we looked at from Swanton's Skidegate text (Swanton, 1911), to the stories recorded in the Alaska Native Language Haida Language Workshop project (e.g., Lawrence, 1975), to Bible 'stories', to traditional and personal narratives (when orally rendered) exhibited this feature.

Within the body of the narrative itself, narrators also employ certain devices to keep an audience attentive and on track with regard to how far along into the narrative they are. These contextualizing devices, then, range from using the same roots over and over again, word building sequentially throughout the narrative, employing narrative element connectives in a certain pattern, to syntactically signalling the approach of the narrative's close by using e.g., negative constructions not used previously in the story. This change in usual sentence pattern in a narrative's final segment is a kind of jolt to lulled listeners to get them to pay heed to the summation part of the narrative just prior to its formulaic close. Such cues to an audience ensure that its members are given as good a chance as possible of following a narrative without the benefit of being able to take turns, interrupt, or ask questions as it progresses. The devices allow them to periodically 'check' that they are comprehending yet do not make it incumbent on them to help the narrator along with devices of their own such as exclamatory verbal cues.

In the remainder of this paper we will look at each such device in turn. We will be drawing for the most part from one exemplar of each type of narrative for which we have data. Our examples will be gleaned then from:

1. personal narrative: e.g., "The Scaredest I've Ever Been in My Life" and "The First Kill" - childhood reminiscences and memories of the old days respectively - told to us in Haida by Lillian Pettviel.
2. traditional narrative: e.g., "qiao qiao" the legend discussed in Edwards and Eastman (1983) and told to us by Lillian Pettviel in Haida and also told to us in English by David Fee.
3. historical narrative: a retelling in Kaigani Haida of the Skidegate story at the end of Swanton's (1911) Haida Grammar: "The Spanish Star", from a collection of Haida historical legends in English put together by Erema Lawrence (1975) and told to us in Kaigani Haida by Lil Pettviel (1984). We also draw on the other historical legends in the Lawrence collection and make some reference to the abstracts of Haida (Kaigani) texts gathered in English by Swanton (1905).
4. biblical narrative: e.g., a Haida translation of Psalm 46 from the Revised Standard version of the Bible.

We hope to show here that the narrative devices described are common to oral narrative in Haida and that they are also often evidenced in transcribed texts as well - sometimes even hinted at in some Haida narratives told in English or gathered and written only in English.

Narrative Openings and Closings

Perhaps the clearest contextualizing cues are words and phrases or sentences used to open and close traditional narratives whether legendary or historical. They may also be used in personal narratives told as stories about one's childhood or the old days. These are formal devices that, as such, do not usually occur in narratives embedded in conversation. They are also missing from our examples of biblical narrative (translated from English) and from stories collected in English (e.g., Swanton, 1905; Lawrence, 1975). When such non-traditional English narratives are translated into Haida, there is an ambivalence manifested with regard to beginnings and endings. This will be seen below when these forms of narrative are discussed in connection with how they are structured in the telling. The formulaic openings and closings set up a frame in which the narrative takes place and block out a period when other people (i.e., the audience) are to be quiet and listen. The opening phrase most often used is awaahl, or awaahl gaal, translated generally as 'a long time ago' or 'once upon a time'. Lawrence (1977:159) glosses these openers as 'long ago' and 'long long ago' respectively. Our experience is that they may be used interchangeably and that there is no distinction such that one is used for events further in the past than another. Traditional narratives end formulaically with a sentence roughly of the form:

"The Scaredest I've Ever Been in My Life" and "The First Kill" - childhood reminiscences and memories of the old days respectively - told to us in Haida by Lillian Pettviel.
This sentential close is followed by an obligatory 'thank you'—usually said twice: haw'aa haw'aa.

The Giants' text at the end of Swanton's grammar in Boas' Handbook of American Indian Languages (1911) referred to by Swanton as "A Raid on the Bella Coola by the People of Ninstints and Kaisun" (1911:277ff) ends with:

Hao Lan a'sgai at gialgalAnndAqai ge'da
here end this of the story comes to an

Once it is retranslated, this actually conforms almost exactly to the formulaic ending we have found to be 'the rule' in Kaigani, i.e.,

Hao Lan a'sgai at gialgalAnndAqai ge'da
this never from then to the story state
There's no more of the story.

When Swanton's script is adapted to the current orthography, the ending in Kaigani Haida becomes:

aao tlaan gyaalhlingaay giidang
this never story the my state

In our Haida rendering of Psalm 46 (Revised Standard Version), an ending is added to the biblical one. After "...the God of Jacob is our refuge" comes:

aao tlaan gyaalhlingaay giidang
this never story the state
At this the story ended.

haw'aa dlang anhl kil leagan
thank you you self+I talk good
Thank you. I myself spoke well to you.

This is said to be a "real Indian" ending. In keeping with the religious tone of the piece the ending is extended with

saan itlaaagdaas xiiitl aehl stang
God us in two the
hang guu dii gwudangan
also topic I pray
I pray also that God is one with us.

Note the use of stang + gwaay (two + definite) to convey the idea of one. This also occurs in the 'title' given Psalm 46, i.e., 'God is with us' rendered as saan itlaaagdaas xiiitl aehl stang; literally 'God with us is two' said to mean 'We become one'. Once the extra ending formula is used, there are then two more haw'aa, haw'aa utterances for 'thank you, thank you'.

Narrative-specific lexical manipulation

One practice that seems common in Haida narrative is to keep the number of actual lexemes to a minimum while effecting nuances of meaning by means of grammatical particles with certain pragmatic and syntactic functions. Looking solely at traditional narrative in our paper for this conference last year (Edwards & Eastman, 1983), we observed there to be a creative verb forming feature—a kind of narrative virtuosity whereby verbs are built from nouns that were key in the story. For example, the raven had been attacking the people's fish with his claws (ga), then we see him as he would be claw-ruining the fish (gadagaangit), and he would get in the habit of claw-ruining them, gadagaangitgigangan, he would claw-shred them (gajihinang) and claw-ruin them again. As the narrative moved along, the constructions in which 'claw' (ga) appeared were more and more complex and novel. In that same story, this device was also used in character development: we are first introduced sententially to a key person in the story, one who understood raven language (nang sëwaansang uu yahl kil an 1 unsidaan - 'there's one, he understands raven language'). This character is a person able to figure out why the ravens are causing such trouble with the people's fish. Then, as that person is referred to again and again, each new mention is a condensation of that sentence through a process of progressive nominalization. The next mention is-

nang sëwaansang yahl kil an unsidaan uu
The raven language understanding one it is
then,
yahl kil an nang unsits uu
Of raven language, the knower it is
and next,
nang yahl kil an 1 unsits
The one who knows raven language
and finally,
nang yahl kil an unsits
The raven language knower
In the story, lexical repetition also involves the root k'aidingaag 'amazing', the root bit 'wait for', and the root bit 'fly'. These examples are discussed more fully in Edwards and Eastman (1983).

In the Haida version of Psalm 46, even though a set text, we see the same phenomenon in the use of the root stang two mentioned above as it occurred at the close of the narrative. The Psalm is referred to in English as 'God is with us', literally rendered in Haida as 'God with us equals two'. Later, where the English is 'The Lord Almight is with us', the form is stangan i.e., 'two' is inflected as a verb. This is carried over in a nominal phrase---saan ilitaagdaa bitl agli stangaay 'The God-with-us pair or two' i.e., the union of God and us. Also in Psalm 46, the roots gagan save and hiGwaak 'fear' are used over and over again, e.g.,

God is our shelter and our strength
saa ilitaagdaa agli uu kiitl gaganag
God with us saved are

It is through God we are saved.

The God of Jacob is with us,

Jacob ngaag bluu kiitl gaganagaa
father with us saved did

We are saved through Jacob's father.

It is interesting that here we may have expected stang 'two' again but that was used just previously in 'The Lord Almight is with us' since the English uses the phrase "...and with us". Later the English essentially repeats the two phrases but when we get 'The God of Jacob is our refuge' this second time it occurs in Haida as:

jacob ngaag uu agli uu kiitl gaganagaa
father it with it us saved are

With Jacob's father it is that we are saved.

hiGwaak occurs in the Haida version of the English "...so we will not be afraid" as

waadluu gam kiitl hiGwaagangaan
then not we fear neg. fut.

Then we will not fear.

What is interesting here is that where the scripture does not repeat the phrase 'we will not fear' after the ensuing lines i.e., '..even if the earth is shaken' etc. and 'even if the seas roar etc.' the Haida does. hiGwaak also occurs in the rendering of 'nations are terrified' as

Gwaagangaan higgwaagang
nations the fear will

In the short personal narrative 'The Scaredest I've Ever Been in My Life', lexical manipulation involves primarily skaaq ('berry') and also hiGwaak again. Skaaq occurs as a verbal noun in skaadangs 'berry picking' e.g.,

weadaaan uu skaadangs ingiini

everyone topic berry goes always
picking

Everyone was always going berry picking.

It also occurs as a definite noun, e.g.,

skaaqsiay kuwingiini
berries the many always were
The berries used to be many.

inflected as a verb, e.g.,

tlang skaadangsingiini we berry picking went
We went berry picking.

tlang skaadangwaitingan dluu...
we berry picking when

...when we went berry-picking...

and again as a verbal noun, e.g.,

dii skaadang kayeqiini
I berry good always
picking
was

I used to be good at berry-picking.

As we saw with the raven story and the root ga 'claw', skaaq 'berry' in this narrative entered progressively more complex constructions. We even get the verb form skaaqsiang gaan 'berry-picking any old way'. hiGwaak also occurs in the 'Scared' story as e.g.,

hiGwaagangaan
scared in such a way

(dii higgwaagii)
(fearing any old way)

I was most afraid

I was afraid

I was always afraid of bears

In our Kaigani version of Swanton's Skidegate story, lexical manipulation of saw 'blow' runs throughout - again a lexical particle not obviously necessary given the content of the story. In the first instance it is used to render '...they entered Bentinck arm' which occurs as;

tluu Bentinck kaaw iik kwuistaaay

Canoes Bentinck Bay into blew go did

...canoes blew (sailed) into Bentinck Ar.
Next it occurs with the incipient verb form -iig- in '...they (people) started out' i.e.,
'tL: wuustlIldaan
They blow go began did
and then in '...they started from Point-Djiidaao'
~wuyaen Djiidaoo kwunst uu l wuustlIldaan
and Djiidaao point it they blow go
from is began did
Next the sentential usage of wu plus ist developed to this point is nominalized to refer to 'some people who were coming along under sail' as
guu wu istaalgays
the ones blow go-ers the
the sailing people
For 'after they had travelled two more nights,' we get
Gahi stang l wu gaa guu kaadluu
night two they blow walk it while
While it was (that) two nights they travelled
Here we get 'blow' + 'walk' for 'travel' in contrast to what we had above i.e., 'blow' + 'go' for 'sail.' (Cf. Lawrence 1977:448 "sail: xukaa"). In our orthography here it would be wuugaa).

Narrative Event Connectives

An additional type of contextualizing cue used to keep audiences involved in Haida narrative may be seen in the way connectives are used. In an earlier paper, (Eastman and Edwards 1982), we described various conjunctions in Kaigani Haida from the point of view of their function within sentences and between words. There are also conjunctions operating above the sentence level that link bits of narrative to each other in a kind of sequencing strategy. Different narratives may use different ones but any narrative will use some conjunctions within sentences and others to link narrative segments which consist of several sentences.

In "The First Kill" the structure is based on using waadluu 'then' to introduce the first segment of the story and link it to the introductory formula and initial event line statement. The body of the story is contained between waadluu and the appearance of esgaay 'and then' a conjunction that introduces the closing statement "...this is the way they honored him for his deed; 'to him they gave the day' is how they refer to it". Then comes the formulaic ending (my story is done, thank you, thank you). The main text or body is related between waadluu and esgaay by sentences linked by diulu 'when' or kaadluu 'while'.

In "dooq adao", the longer traditional raven story (as described in Edwards and Eastman, 1983), esgaay is the connective starting the main narrative with waadluu introducing each event after that except for the very final segment which begins with waadluu uu 'after that it is...'. With the main segments signalled by waadluu, various sentential connectives such as gyaenaan 'and', hayaan 'while still', and daenuu 'then' are used event internally linking subsections of the story such as diulu and kaadluu did in "The First Kill".

waadluu and waadlaa have slightly different connotations. waadluu occurs between descriptions of two contiguous events while waadluu disconnects the sequent from the precedent, e.g., "They went to Carta Bay and then (waadluu) they heard something in the woods. They left Carta Bay and after that (waadlaa) they found out what the noise had been." So when waadluu occurs at points within the story it's function is to indicate yet another event in a sequence but waadluu brings the audience out of the story to today's consequences. Both waadluu and esgaay occur frequently in all of the narratives we looked at as episode markers. In "The Scaredest I've ever Been in My Life", waadluu begins the main event and esgaayst signals the beginning of the close. The esgaayst 'from then' section of a narrative generally is intended to convey content on the order of "ever since then I no longer do X ravens no longer do Y" etc.

Both waadluu and esgaayst may occur in non-narrative contexts. That is, they are not restricted to functioning as indicators of narrative structure. In conversational usage esgaayst connects facts and may be glossed 'for this reason'. This is similar to the use of gyaenaan in non-narrative discourse. Where gyaenaan links two clauses and in so doing reverses the sense of the first (see Eastman and Edwards, 1982), esgaayst links clauses such that the second reaffirms the first e.g.,
jam tlawunh sguunan uu hl nilgan
drink six only it I drank

gyaenaan (uu) tlijGusdaan gin kiningaa
and unexpectedly
aad'aavaa hl kinggan
I see
I only drank six drinks and unexpectedly already I am seeing monsters.

A comparable construction using esgavst

is

taamaayt on hl yuwhatalgaan

bears self die

esgavst hanuu taan gii ga hl'waak gii

from then once bears I afraid always

I (thought I would) die (of fear of) the bears. From

then on I was scared of bears forever.

The audience knows that when waadluu and esgavst are used

major events are being segmented. Even the Psalm recast

narratively begins with waadluu narrowing the focus to God

our shelter and strength being ready to help us in times of

trouble. The most frequent internal connective used in the

Haida version of Psalm 46 is duwaanuu ‘even if’ with uuuyaan

‘and’ common as well. There is no final event marked in the

Psalm by a connective shift, i.e., we get no waatlaa uu or

esgavst. This may be indicative of narrator uncertainty as to

whether it is a narrative or really geared for translation to Haida narrative form. This unnaturalness of

translating the Psalm is reinforced by the ‘extra’ ending

added after the formulaic narrative one. It is as if the

narrator knows something is wrong and then fixes it up with

the post-thankyou extra prayer given as a blessing —

effectively changing the Psalm into a prayer after it has

been ‘told’ as a narrative.

In narrative embedded in conversation, once the topic is

presented, the story line is begun and kept going with the

connective waadluu. In our version of Swanton’s Skidegate

story (retold in Kainain Haida), the events are linked by

uuuyaan ‘and’. Events that follow uuuyaan comprise the main

body of the story of the raid. The final segment of the

narrative is introduced by waatlaa and gives us the

consequences of the chain of events. uu serves as an

information introducing particle prefixed to gyaan ‘and’;

waa is a completive particle. (cf. Haida Dictionary

1977,p.383 - waa ‘there, that, it’; uu ‘introductory

particle’).

From Swanton’s (1905) English texts, many of which are

just abstracts of narratives told to him in English, we

cannot discern structure via connectives because of the

tendency not to make such distinctions in English and

because Swanton was getting only the gist of the stories and

not the essence of their performance. In these English-Haida

stories it appears that the connectives have been randomly

normalized to ‘and’ and ‘then’.

Final Segment Structure

In each of the narratives we looked at, noticeable

changes in syntactic pattern took place within the last

segment (i.e. that initiated by a switch to esgavst or

waatlaa). In “qaaq qaaq”, the final segment

beginning with waatlaa contains the only negative verb

form used in the whole story and the narrator steps outside

the story to assert that what has just been said is true.

"The Spanish Story", given in English by Erna Lawrence

(1975) and told in Haida by Lil Petttivel (1974), also uses

negative verb forms only at the end saying that once the

Spanish left the area taking some Haida children with them

“...the Haidas never saw them again. These Spanish people

never reported what they did with the four Haida children.

No report ever came back.” As with “qaaq qaaq” here too in

the final segment, the content is less story than direct

talk to the audience i.e., in both cases the audience is

being told that they are expected to believe what they’ve

heard. Here, just because we have no report does not mean

that the Spanish people did not take some Haida children

away with them. Lack of evidence does not mean that the

event did not happen.

In the Skidegate story, as told in Kaigani, the

narrative ends with a negative NP form:

gin tl’ taanaan an tlaGihldaaj gyaanaan uu

what they went for completing and unexpectedly

sihlaaan tl’ sidiilaa gaa aan tl’ tlaGihldaaj

back they arrived not it they completed

tlaG jiigaan dju

country far when

in

"That which they went to complete is what they

unexpectedly arrived back not having completed it

while (they were) far off."

That is, the people who went on the raid failed when away to

successfully conduct the raid and had to return NOT having

met their goal.

Conclusion

In some sense what we have been discussing in these pages

is a form of language use above both the word and sentence

level akin to what Grice has called implicature. That is,

these linguistic devices represent "assumptions over and

above the meaning of the sentence used which the speaker
knows and intends that the hearer will make...in order to interpret the speaker's sentence" (Kempson 1975:143). What Gumperz (1982: Chapter 6) has called "contextualizing cues", also with reference to conversation, appear to be of such a nature as well. Here we have looked at how narrators express assumptions about sequence and consequences for audience interpretation when the form of language use is narrative discourse rather than conversation. In Haida, based on this rather cursory look at a range of narrative forms, it appears that narrators utilize contextualizing cues to aid the audience's ability to interpret a story be it personal, traditional, embedded in conversation, or adapted from another medium (such as the Bible, Swanton's texts, English renderings of Haida stories etc.). Psalm 46 did not begin with the usual traditional narrative opener, yet it did have connected segments translated as sequential episodes and the narrator used lexical manipulation and a formulaic ending. The final segment, however, did not come to any summation or manifest a change in cadence. Despite its narrative aspects, Psalm 46 did not come out "right" as a traditional story. There was no final "from then..." segment. As Gumperz (1982:150-151) noted, "Miscommunication caused by contextualizing conventions reflects phenomena that are typically sociolinguistic, in the sense that their interpretive weight is much greater than their linguistic import...Whenever they occur, they have the effect of retrospectively changing the character of what has gone before and of reshaping the entire course of an interaction."

In Psalm 46 confusion came when the content did not lend itself to a final segment with the result that the Psalm was retrospectively changed from a Psalm to a prayer. When we tried working from English translations of e.g., "The Spanish Story", Psalm 46, or Swanton's Skidegate text, we discovered that contextualizing cues that would have been there had the narrative been told in Haida were missing and speakers doing the translating from English to Haida became as Gumperz predicted (p.157) "Aware of vague difficulties in communication" which they did not think of as "...difficulties that may have linguistic causes".

When a story is being told in Haida, the teller will
1. use an opening formula, particularly if the narrative is traditional/historical
2. use some form of lexical manipulation, e.g., build single words gradually by transforming sentences employed at the outset or use the same particles literally at first and metaphorically later
3. begin the main story line with a connective, repeatedly mark new segments (when a story has many events in it) with it until coming to the final segment which is introduced by a different connective (of a summarizing nature)
4. use negative forms or asides or somehow otherwise change cadence in the final segment as a signal that the story is over and the summary is being made.
5. use a formulaic ending followed by 'thank you', said twice.

Some of the contextualizing cues used by story tellers structure sequences in a way similar to "and then...and then..." in English oral narratives. Others operate in such a way that, within a segment a particle, word, or sentence may later be used only metaphorically or in an altered form (as e.g., "the raven language knower") the summarizing connective (e.g., esqaayt, waadlaa or waaqyaan) signalling the final segment gives the audience a chance to find out what the consequences of the narrative might have been. Here the audience is given information in a novel form alerting it to prepare for the end and to respond to the narrator's thanks with that of its own.

What we have described in these pages is what struck us as quite obvious once we began to look at the range of examples of narrative that we had collected. Next we hope to take a more in depth look at narrative internal structure and begin to examine in detail how metaphor plays a part in Haida expressive culture. What interested us here was what we found to be a surprising similarity of narrator devices consistent across narrators and narrative forms.

We did not expect to find out that different narrative forms have such similar structures. Granted that a negative verb form in a narrative concluding statement indicates that a narrative is about to close we do not find any need to make an exception here in ours so,

"Our story has ended.
Thank you, thank you."
Sources


Notes

1 We wish to acknowledge the assistance of the Penrose Fund of the American Philosophical Society for funds to carry out this research and to express our gratitude to our primary language consultant, Lil Pettvel, whose personal interest in the preservation of Haida language and texts has greatly enhanced our efforts.

2 The verbs skaaoa and skaan are composed of the following parts: ska- stem, dang aspect, iing- manner, gaan narrative tense; and ska- stem, dang aspect, -aan narrative tense marker, iing, manner (focused), (g)an aspect.