Event line structure in Vwanji narratives

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Defining the semantic main event line

Payne (1992: 379), following Labov & Waletzky (1967) and Hopper (1979), identifies a clause as part of the semantic main event line if it has two functional properties:

> (a) It must report an event as actually occurring. The "event" cannot be a hypothetical one that is presented as possibly occurring in the future or one that might have occurred in the past. States, which are nonevents by definition, are also excluded. (b) The actual reporting of the event must advance the action of the narrative along a chronological time line.

Four factors which influence formal realisation of event line structure in Vwanji[1]

1. Relative chronological order of events

Narrative[2] (SP-NAR-VB-FV) is the default choice for perfective events in event line:[3]

(1) Lʉkelʉke   a-kinul-a   ʉ-lʉ-voko   lwake,   a-ka-tool-a   i-sengo
     slowly   1.SP-NAR.lift.up-FV AUG-11-hand 11.PP.3SG.POSS 1.SP-NAR.take-FV   AUG-9.sickle

     a-kihʉʉt-a   a-ka-tem-a.
     1.SP-NAR.thrust.down-FV   1.SP-NAR-cut-FV

     'Slowly he lifted up his hand, took the sickle, thrust (it) down and cut.' (Cow Buyer 16)

Exception for two speech verbs:

(2) ʉ-mʉ-ghoosi   a-kamʉl-a   a-ka-ti,   "Pwe-ji-veele   bahaapa."
     AUG-1-man   1.SP-NAR.answer-FV   1.SP-NAR-say   16.LOC-9.SP-be.ANT   16.PROX.DEM.REDUP

     'The man answered saying, "It was right here."' (Cat 16)

Narrative auxiliary plus Present (SP-NPST-VB-FV) for imperfective events in event line:

(3) ʉ-ng'ina   ye   i-gomok-a   ku-ku-jimilisi-a,   a-ka-kʉmbʉk-a   kuuti
     AUG.1A-mother when 1.SP.NPST-return-FV 15-15.REFL-relieve-FV 1.SP-NAR-remember-FV   15.say

     a-veele   a-syemilue   ku-dind-a   ʉ-mʉ-lyango.
     1.SP-be.ANT   1.SP-forget.ANT   15-close-FV   AUG-3-door

     'As the mother was returning from relieving herself, she remembered that she had forgotten to close the door.

     Pe   a-ka-v-a   i-kwingil-a   mʉ   nyumba nʉ   vwoghofi.
     and.so   1.SP-NAR-be-FV   1.SP.NPST-15.enter-FV 18.LOC   9.house COM.AUG   14.fear

     And so she entered the house in fear.' (Parents 12-14)

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[1] Vwanji (G.66, /ˈβʷaːⁿɟi/) is spoken in the Kipengere Mountains in Makete District, Njombe Region, southwestern Tanzania. Neighbouring languages include Bena (G.63), Kinga (G.65) and Sangu (G.61).

[2] The Narrative verb form in Vwanji is not dependent on a preceding establishing tense and thus, following Longacre (1990: 109), is analysed as a narrative rather than a consecutive.

[3] ANT anterior, AUG augment, CAUS causative, COM comitative, CON connective, CONTR contrastive, DEM demonstrative, DIST distal, EMPH emphatic, EP numeral prefix, FV final vowel, INTERJ interjection, IPFV imperfective, LOC locative, NAR narrative, NEG negative, NP nominal prefix, NPST non-past, OP object prefix, PL plural, POSS possessive, PP pronominal prefix, PRO pronoun, PROX proximal, PST past, RECP reciprocal, REDUP reduplicated, REFL reflexive, SG singular, SP subject prefix, VB verbal base.

Events in event line elaborated upon by means of following Present or Anterior (SP-VB-ANT) verb:

(4) … <u>a-ka-vʉʉk-a</u>   <u>i-hʉm-a</u>   kʉnji,
     1.SP-NAR-leave-FV   1.SP.NPST-go.out-FV   outside

     <u>i-lʉt-a</u>   ku-kwisi-a   na   va-ghogholo   a-va-nine.
     1.SP.NPST-go-FV   15-15.chat-FV   COM.AUG   2-old.person   AUG-2.NP-fellow

     '… he left, going outside to chat with his fellow old people.' (Generosity 7)

2. Degree of connection between events

Narrative plus Present for quick succession:

(5) … <u>a-ka-tool-a</u>   i-mbunda ji-la,   <u>i-hʉm-a</u>   <u>ku-lu-a</u>   ɨ-li-lʉgʉ.
     1.SP-NAR-take-FV   AUG-9.club   9.EP-DIST.DEM   1.SP.NPST-go.out-FV   15-fight-FV   AUG-5-war

     '… he took that club, going out to do battle.' (Parents 16)

Narrative plus Present with shared argument:

(6) A-ka-fik-a,   <u>a-ka-m'-bon-a</u>   ʉ-n'-diimi
     1.SP-NAR-arrive-FV   1.SP-NAR-1.OP-see-FV   AUG-1-youth

     <u>i-hʉm-a</u>   mʉ   nyumba   ja   n-twa, <u>a-fwal-ile</u>   vʉ-nono.
     1.SP.NPST-go.out-FV   18.LOC   9.house   9.PP.CON   1-chief   1.SP-wear-ANT   14.NP-good

     'She arrived and saw the youth coming out of the chief's house dressed well.' (Chief 32)

Narrative plus Present and *kʉmo* 'while' for loosely connected events:

(7) <u>Ʉ-Mbututu</u>   na-a-ka-pʉlɨk-ɨsyagh-a,
     AUG.1A-Mbututu   NEG-1.SP-NAR-hear-CAUS.IPFV-FV

     <u>a-ka-v-a</u>   <u>i-fwet-a</u>   kʉmo   <u>i-ghend-a~ghend-a</u>.
     1.SP-NAR-be-FV   1.SP.NPST-curse-FV   while   1.SP.NPST-walk-FV~walk-FV

     'Mbututu would not listen, he was cursing as he walked around.' (Mbututu 13)

3. Relative importance of events

Highlighting with Present or Anterior verb:

(8) Hɨmbe   <u>a-tem-ile</u>   ʉ-lu-ghʉlʉ   lwake   jʉjuo!
     INTERJ   1.SP-cut-ANT   AUG-11-leg   11.PP.3SG.POSS   1.EMPH.PRO

     'Oh, he has cut his own leg!' (Cow Buyer 17)

(9) Ɨ-lʉsongue   jaale   ni   ng'haki kange   ʉ-mʉ-lomo   ghwake   n-tali
     AUG-9.sunbird   9.SP.PST4.be.ANT   COM.AUG   10.haste again   AUG-3-beak   3.PP.3SG.POSS   3.NP-long

     'The sunbird was hasty and what's more its beak was long

     ji-ka-ti,   "Nɨ-longolel-e   pi-nyulukil-a."
     9.SP-NAR-say   1SG.SP-precede-FV   15-reach.for-FV

     and it said, "Let me reach for (it) first."

     Hɨmbe   <u>ji-solokel-a</u>   nkate   mʉ   meeta!
     INTERJ   9.SP.NPST-fall.down-FV   inside   18.LOC   9.bamboo.spile

     Oh, it falls down into the bamboo spile!

I-n-juni   i-si-ngi   si-ka-ti…
AUG-10-bird   AUG-10.EP-other   10.SP-NAR-say
The other birds said…' (Hasty Bird 11-13a)

Downplaying by backgrounding event line clause as temporal relative:

(10) I-n-juni   si-ka-pɨling'han-a   ku-kong'haan-a.
     AUG-10-bird   10.SP-NAR-agree.RECP-FV   15-gather.RECP-FV

'The birds agreed to gather together.

     <u>Ye</u>   <u>si-kong'han-ile</u>,   si-ka-posani-a   kuuti…
     when   10.SP-gather.RECP-ANT   10.SP-NAR-ask.RECP-FV   15.say
     After they gathered together, they asked each other saying…' (Hasty Bird 4-5)

Pragmatically predictable event downplayed:

(11) I-kɨ-ghono i-kya   vɨ-vilɨ   <u>ye</u>   <u>kɨ-fik-ile</u>,
     AUG-7-day   AUG-7.PP.CON   14.EP-two   when   7.SP-arrive-ANT

     ɨ-Tɨdesaghe   a-ka-kɨmbɨk-a   kuuti…
     AUG.1A-Tudesaghe   1.SP-NAR-remember-FV   15.say
     'When the second day arrived, Tudesaghe remembered that…' (Friendship 35)

Thematically significant passing of time not downplayed:

(12) I-kɨ-ghono <u>ki-ka-fik-a</u>   i-kya   kɨ-va-tavɨk-a   a-va-hɨnja
     AUG-7-day   7.SP-NAR-arrive-FV   AUG-7.PP.CON   15-2.OP-line.up-FV   AUG-2-girl

     pa=maaso   gha   n-tolan'dala
     16.LOC=6.eye   6.PP.CON   1-bridegroom
     'The day arrived for lining up the girls in front of the bridegroom.' (Chief 21)

4. Location of events relative to the deictic centre

Auxiliary plus *ku-* infinitive for events away from deictic centre:

(13) Ɨ-Nkoola   ye   <u>a-lɨ</u>   <u>ku-tiigh-a</u>   ni   fya   mwene,
     AUG.1A-Nkoola   when   1.SP-be   15-deal.with-FV   COM.AUG   8.PP.CON   3SG.CONTR.PRO
     'As Nkoola was dealing with his things,

     na-a-ka-pɨlɨk-a   kuuti   ɨ-Mpeesi   a-n-kemel-ile.
     NEG-1.SP-NAR-hear-FV   15.say   AUG.1A-Mpeesi   1.SP-1.OP-call-ANT
     he didn't hear that Mpeesi had called him.' (Friendship 27)

Narrative plus Present for movement towards or away from the deictic centre:

(14) Ghɨ-ka-kil-a   ɨ-mwaka   ghɨ-mo,
     3.SP-NAR-pass-FV   AUG-3.year   3.EP-one

     ɨ-Mbututu   <u>a-ka-kyɨl-a</u>   <u>i-lɨt-a</u>   kɨ   Vɨ-sango.
     AUG.1A-Mbututu   1.SP-NAR-travel-FV   1.SP.NPST-go-FV   17.LOC   14-Sangu
     'One year passed and Mbututu travelled (going) to the Sangu area.' (Mbututu 15)

(15) Aveene   va-ka-swev-a   i-sanjala,   <u>va-ka-vʉʉk-a</u>   <u>vi-vuj-a.</u>
    3PL.CONTR.PRO 2.SP-NAR-pick.up-FV AUG-10.firewood 2.SP-NAR-leave-FV 2.SP.NPST-return-FV

    'They picked up the firewood and left (returning).' (Three Children 11)

pi- infinitive for event at deictic centre, *ku-* infinitive for event away from deictic centre:

(16) Pe   <u>a-kasi-a</u>   <u>pi-pɪnd-a</u>,   <u>i-lʉt-a</u>   <u>ku-fis-a.</u>
    and.so 1.SP-NAR.start-FV 15-carry-FV 1.SP.NPST-go-FV 15-hide-FV

    'And so he started to carry (it), going to hide (it).' (Jackal 12)

The interplay of these functional factors means that many formal options are available to the Vwanji narrator for presenting two consecutive events on the main event line:

1. **NAR** (default, perfective)
<u>akatoola</u> isengo, <u>akihʉʉta</u> ('he took the sickle, thrust (it) down')

2. **NAR aux + PRES** (imperfective)
<u>akava</u> <u>ikwingila</u> mʉ nyumba ('she entered the house')

3. **PRES** (if event immediately follows preceding one)
akatoola ɪmbunda jila, <u>ihʉma</u> ('he took that club, going out')

4. **PRES or ANT** (if event is highlighted)
hɪmbe <u>jisolokela</u> nkate mʉ meeta ('oh, it falls down into the bamboo spile')

5. ***ye*-clause + ANT** (if event is downplayed)
ye <u>sikong'hanile</u> ('after they gathered together')

6. **INF *pi-* or *ku-*** (relative to deictic centre)
akasia <u>pipɪnda</u>, ilʉta <u>kufisa</u> ('he started to carry (it), going to hide (it)')

Further questions to consider
- How can we clearly distinguish (in functional terms) between separate, closely connected events realised by different verbs and a single macroevent realised by multiple verbs?
- How does the relative importance of events in the narrative relate to the other three factors identified so far? E.g. Are events presented out of order in order to be highlighted or downplayed? Is the narrator able to move the deictic centre of the narrative in order to highlight or downplay certain events?
- Can the distribution of the *pi-* infinitive be adequately described by reference to the deictic centre of the narrative? How is it used in text genres which do not have a physical location as a deictic centre?

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