

The Flow of New Information in Narrative Discourse

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A proper treatment of new referents necessitates rethinking and refinement of the A-S-O categorization (Du Bois, 1987; Kumagai, 2006; Dixon, 1994). Investigating a temporal status of new referents (i.e., whether or not they appear in a clause which serves to advance a storyline) is essential. We also need to give a special status to the constructions tailored to new referent introduction. Further, a consideration of the discrepancy between the linguistic form and its actual temporal status is inevitable. With these analytical tools, we can detect clear tendencies in the narratives of male and female speakers of American English who narrated a short film known as *Pear Film* (Chafe, 1980). Agentive subjects tend to be avoided as a locus for new referent introduction. Furthermore, the new referents in the clause-core argument positions exhibit an ergative patterning (i.e., non-agentive intransitive subjects and objects are the preferred loci) if the clause containing new referents serves to advance a storyline, while in other types of clauses the preferred locus for new information is the object. Since these results are consistent with a universal tendency for certain types of nominal expressions to become an agent (Dixon, 1994), and since the availability of constructions for new referent introduction is observed in other languages such as French (Lambrecht, 1986, 1994) and Sakapultek Maya (Du Bois, 1987), it is expected that the proposed method can be applied to various types of spoken data, either in English or other languages.