

# FEATURES MARKING PEAK AND PEAK' IN HAUSA FOLKTALES

Ann Elizabeth (Johnson) Brye  
University of Texas at Arlington

## 0. INTRODUCTION

Longacre (1983a.24) defines **Peak** in discourse grammar as 'any episode-like unit set apart by special surface structure features and corresponding to the Climax or Denouement in the notional structure.' When both Climax and Denouement are marked in the surface structure, they can be referred to respectively as **Peak** and **Peak'**. He further defines the Climax as 'the spot of maximum tension' and the Denouement as the 'crucial event...which makes possible the resolution of the plot' (Longacre 1981.349).

It is probably true in most languages that Peak and Peak' are marked in a variety of ways; Hausa is no exception. In this paper I will look at such features in four short Hausa folktales (the texts are from Kraft 1973 and are found in the Appendix). For each one I will summarize the overall surface and notional structure, focusing on the Climax and Denouement, or Peak and Peak'.

### 1. Kààzaa dà Giiwaa 'HEN AND ELEPHANT'

Kààzaa dà Giiwaa 'Hen and Elephant' is the story of a dispute between the characters (see the text below). The tale begins with a dialogue between the two in which Hen says that she can eat more than Elephant can, and challenges her to a grazing contest. After they have grazed a few hours, Elephant becomes tired and wants to rest, so they go and drink some water, and Elephant finds some shade and lies down. Hen, however, continues scratching the ground looking for food.

Up to this point, the verbs of the narrative have all been in the relative completive aspect. This sentence (about Hen scratching the ground) alone is in the progressive aspect, which, I propose, signifies the transition to Peak. It begins the 'zone of turbulence in the flow of discourse' referred to by Longacre (1983a.25). What follows is that Hen sees a tick in the sleeping elephant's eye, lowers her beak, and stabs at it. This is the **Climax**, the point of 'maximum tension' when the reader is in suspense wondering what Elephant's response will be. The Climax is marked by the brevity and simplicity of the sentence: **Ta zuuràà, ta cakèè** 'She lowered (her beak), she stabbed'.

The transition to Peak' is marked by the particle **sai**. Elephant leaps to her feet and delivers a monologue to Hen in which she rebukes her for her action and asks: **Duk kiiwò-n nân dà mukà yi bà kì k'òòshi ba? Dà idòò-naa zaa-kì k'aaaràà?** 'With all this grazing we've done, aren't you full? Will you finish off by eating my eye?' This monologue marks the actual Denouement, as we see now how Elephant responds, her response being the 'crucial event' which leads to the resolution of the plot. The end of Peak' and the beginning of the Conclusion of the narrative is marked by another instance of **sai**. We are told that Elephant goes off into 'the bush', and Hen is the winner.

### 2. Dilaa dà Zalbèè 'JACKAL AND HERON'

In this tale Dilaa (Jackal) is eating chicken and gets a bone caught in his throat. He goes around looking for someone to pull it out for him, offering a reward to anyone

who will. *Zalbéè* (Heron) comes along and says that he will do it. The Climax is reached when Jackal opens his mouth, and Heron sticks his head in and pulls out the bone. This is the point of greatest tension when the reader wonders what will happen to Heron as he sticks his head in this dangerous animal's mouth. In the Denouement and Conclusion, Jackal turns to go and Heron asks for his reward. Jackal responds that his reward is that he stuck his head in Jackal's mouth and got away with it.

Peak and Peak' in this story are marked by characteristics of sentence structure. Up until Peak, the sentences are all relatively complex in structure, mostly containing dependent clauses. At Peak, however, we find a series of three simple transitive clauses describing events occurring almost simultaneously: *Dilaa ya budê bààkii, zalbéè ya saà kâ-n-sà, ya zaar-oo k'àshî-n* 'Jackal opened his mouth, Heron placed his head (inside), and he pulled out the bone'. The complex sentence which follows (when Jackal turns to go) marks Peak'. This is followed by Post-Peak and Closure, marked by the occurrence of dialogue with direct quotations, standing in stark contrast to the indirect discourse style found at the beginning of the story.

### 3. Kuuraa dà Gàngaa 'HYENA AND THE DRUM'

In this story *Kuuraa* (Hyena) is feeling hungry, when she sees a hare sleeping at the base of a tree. She is about to grab him, when she hears a noise and looks up to see a drum hanging from the tree. She is excited and concludes that it must be a gift from God and must contain rich food. At the Climax she decides to ignore the hare and jumps up and pulls the drum down. The drum falls to the ground, making a noise and waking the hare, who runs away. There is great tension as one wonders what Hyena will find in the drum. The tension loosens and the conflict begins to be resolved as she bites into the drum and sees only the hole she has made. She concludes proverbially that noise is not the same as meat.

As in *Dilaa dà Zalbéè*, Peak in *Kuuraa dà Gàngaa* is marked by a relatively simpler sentence structure. The tale begins with complex sentences containing dependent clauses, and one direct quotation. Peak is marked first by the use of the particle *sai* and then by sentences made up of independent clauses strung together. The ideophone *gan*, representing the noise made by the drum as it falls to the ground, might also be seen as a feature marking Peak here. The sentence at the beginning of the Denouement is again a little more complex, with the phrase *ta huudàà* 'she pierced' occurring with the clause *ta saà hak'oorii* 'she placed her teeth'. The particle *sai* also occurs again, marking the transition to Peak'.

### 4. Kùnkuruu dà `Ungùluu 'TORTOISE AND VULTURE'

In this text *Kùnkuruu* (Tortoise) is always watching his neighbors, the birds, flying around in the sky. This makes him jealous; he feels that if he could only fly, he would be happy. So he goes to the home of `Ungùluu (Vulture) and tells him that if he will teach him how to fly, he will give him all his worldly wealth. Vulture refuses at first, but finally gives in. The Climax is reached as he lifts Tortoise up into the sky, and the reader anticipates what will happen to him. Will Tortoise learn to fly, or will there be disaster? The tension lessens as we see the result in the Denouement. Vulture releases Tortoise with an exclamation, and Tortoise falls onto some stones and shatters. The moral of the story is given at the end: If you want to be happy, stay where God puts you.

The onset of Peak in this story is marked by the phrase *shii kèè nan* 'so it was', and again by the particle *sai*, followed by a relatively simple sentence structure. The point of greatest tension at the end of Peak is highlighted by the repetition of the phrase *ya tàfi, ya tàfi* 'he went and went (higher and higher)'. Peak', in this case, is not marked by simpler sentence structure, but rather by the exclamation, and the subsequent change of aspect from relative completive to completive: *yaa faad-oo kâ-n duwààtsuu, yaa tararràtsee* 'he fell on top of some rocks, he shattered'.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In all four of these folktales a change from complex to simpler sentence structure marks Peak, which would seem to suggest that this is a common way of identifying Peak in Hausa narratives. The particle *sai* also seems to be used quite frequently to mark both Peak and Peak', as well as other points of transition in the discourse structure. The Denouement is marked twice by dialogue, and a change in aspect also occurs twice as a marker. An ideophone is used once, and an exclamation is used once.

These characteristics, therefore, represent some ways in which Peak and Peak' can be identified in Hausa folktales. A more comprehensive study including other types of narratives will be necessary before it will be possible to draw any sweeping conclusions about Hausa narrative structure, but these proposals form a set of hypotheses for further testing.