

# The Meegye Connective *BHE* as a Discourse Developmental Marker

BY ROBERT GUY MCKEE, PH.D.

SIL Africa Area

## ABSTRACT

The Meegye connective *bhe* is analyzed as what Dooley and Levinsohn 2001 have called a discourse developmental marker. (Meegye is Nilo-Saharan, Central Sudanic, East, Mangbetu-Asoa.) *Bhe* is first identified in terms of its phonetic, phonemic, and orthographic forms in modern Meegye, and of references to it in the grammars of Vekens 1928 and Larochette 1958. There is then a summary of Dooley and Levinsohn's cross-linguistic characterization of developmental markers, which these authors say serve primarily to mark new developments in a story or argument. In the paper's longest section, an examination of where *bhe* is and is not deployed in a number of oral tale texts leads to the conclusion that *bhe* fits reasonably well Dooley and Levinsohn's cross-linguistic characterization of developmental markers. Prior to a brief summary-conclusion, the fact that *bhe* does not mark all event-line verbs is taken to suggest the need to recognize for Meegye two related discourse phenomena: (1) a distinction between something like two kinds of main event line—viz., 'ordinary' and 'tense/peak' (as posited for Yagua by Payne 1992); and (2) an animation hierarchy of basic event-line verb forms—from the basic and least-animated distal past to a most-animated proximate non-past.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

In this paper,<sup>1</sup> I suggest that the Meegye connective *bhe* functions in oral tale narrative largely as what DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001 call a developmental marker. Such markers, they say, are discourse connectives that "constrain the reader to *move on to the next point*. ... [T]hey indicate that the material so marked represents a new development in the story or argument, as far as the author's purpose is concerned" (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 93, italics in the original). Thus, the paper's general concern is with Meegye discourse grammar, its primary data are from connected natural texts, and it is the pragmatics of *bhe*'s deployment in such texts that is of special interest.

Meegye is Central Sudanic, East, Mangbetu-Asoa subgroup. It is spoken to the southwest and northeast of Isiro in the northeastern Democratic Republic of Congo.<sup>2</sup>

The paper has four main sections. In the first, I identify *bhe* in terms of its orthographic and other forms, of literature treatments of it, and of its functioning at sentence level as a conjunction. In the second, I summarize what DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN say about developmental markers as a cross-linguistic class. In the third, I provide evidence from a number of oral tale texts that *bhe* does largely fit DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN's cross-linguistic characterization. I find this definitely true with regard to both 1) *bhe* marking most of what a narrator presumably intends as new developments in the main event line, and also 2) its often marking different-subject reference across clauses. In the fourth, partly on the basis of some additional tale data, I suggest in relation to *bhe*'s *not* marking *all* event-line verbs the need to perhaps recognize for Meegye two related discourse phenomena: 1) a distinction between something like two kinds of main event line—viz., 'ordinary' and 'tense/peak'; and 2) an animation hierarchy of basic event-line verb forms—from the basic and least-animated distal past to a most-animated proximate non-past.

The paper also has a brief conclusion. As one of its points, I note with regard to the paper's analysis of *bhe* the need for further careful study of its deployment in a larger, more-completely-analyzed tale corpus.

## 2 THE MEEGYE CONNECTIVE *BHE*

*Bhe* is the full orthographic form<sup>3</sup> of what I believe to be the more widespread of the connective's two Meegye variants; the less widespread is *bha*.<sup>4</sup> Their phonemic forms, respectively, are /bè/ and /bà/. Only *bhe* (with sub-variants *bh'* and *e*) occurs in the paper's example data. The sub-variant *bh'* is joined in writing to whichever word follows, which invariably begins with one of Meegye's 'non-high' vowels /e, ε, α, o, ɔ/.<sup>5</sup>

Reprinted by permission from:

McKee, Robert Guy. 2006. The Meegye connective *bhe* as a discourse developmental marker. In Al-Amin Abu-Manga, Leoma Gilley, and Anne Storch (eds.), *Insights into Nilo-Saharan Language, History and Culture: Proceedings of the 9<sup>th</sup> Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium, Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum, February 16–19, 2004*, 309–326. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag.

Each of the two grammars of Mangbetu and Meegye—VEKENS (1928) and LAROCLETTE (1958)—treats a connective that one can readily identify with what this paper treats as *bhe*. VEKENS wrote it rather as *ba*, but according to an analysis and orthography that did not yet distinguish imploded from non-imploded stops; and he glossed it in French as *et* or perhaps *alors* (VEKENS 1928: 65, 92).<sup>6</sup> LAROCLETTE wrote it as *ba* for Mangbetu and *bě* for Meegye, albeit according to an analysis and orthography that *did* then distinguish imploded stops; and he said, with regard to glossing it, that “[il] se traduit parfois par *et*, mais souvent ne doit pas se traduire en français” (LAROCLETTE 1958: 92).<sup>7</sup> Both VEKENS and LAROCLETTE recognized that the connective’s vowel sometimes elided. Finally, their grammars each include a number of tale texts in which the connective appears throughout the tales.

At sentence level, Meegye *bhe* is a conjunction—i.e., it serves to conjoin predications. When these are coordinate, it can readily gloss as ‘and’; when they are not coordinate, it can or does gloss otherwise, and is sometimes best left unglossed. Meegye uses other means to conjoin lower-level constituents—e.g., the conjunction *bhu* to conjoin noun phrases.<sup>8</sup> The examples<sup>9</sup> below are of these two conjunctions at their respective levels:

- (1) Nyéngá ze *bhe* nyá ú múa ze ?  
2S:rise:PN-P:PV where? and 2S:be:PN-P there 2S:go:PN-P where?  
‘Where have you come from and where are you going?’
- (2) Ka múti ámémolo né, *e* nyésí ka.  
NEG 2S:know ANA:work SID (then) 2S:do NEG  
‘If you don’t know that work, (then) you don’t do it.’
- (3) ándró sóorú *bhu* too némasí kana  
PABS:women two and also SABS:man one  
‘two women and also one man’

As explained in the introduction, it is how *bhe* functions *above* sentence level, as a developmental marker in oral tale texts, that is the focus of this paper.

### 3 DEVELOPMENTAL MARKERS CROSS-LINGUISTICALLY

According to DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001, developmental markers are a common discourse feature of the world’s languages, and they tend to pattern in them along the same lines. In this section, I summarize what DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN say about these markers cross-linguistically, to the extent that I deem it relevant to this paper’s analysis.<sup>10</sup> What they say, in any case, they explicitly confine to these markers’ use in narrative.

DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN see developmental markers as generally marking *foreground* material rather than background, and thus as marking *events* rather than *nonevents*. They see events as generally ordered in temporal sequence and constituting “what is sometimes called the EVENT LINE (story line, main line, time line)” (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 81). They do *not* expect developmental markers to mark *all semantic* events, but only those that the narrator intends as *new developments in the event line*.

Concerning *nonevents*, DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN follow GRIMES (1975) in recognizing six types—viz., participant orientation, setting, explanation, evaluation, discourse irrealis, and performative information. Thus, they do *not* expect developmental markers to mark any such nonevent types of material—e.g., where participants are being introduced or described, where the scene of a narrative is being set, or where something in fact does *not* happen (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 82-83, 94).

In a related regard, concerning *story schema categories* such as abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution (or result), and coda,<sup>11</sup> DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN point out that “certain natural associations hold between types of information in narrative ... and parts of a story schema” (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 106). By such natural associations, they say that events and the use of developmental markers to mark them are most natural in narrative sections of complicating action and resolution.

Finally, in addition to their general rule that developmental markers are used with foreground, event, and new development rather than with background, nonevent, and what is *not* new development, DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN also note each of the following: that “[d]evelopmental markers in VO languages have been found to be either conjunctions ... or [else] particles associated with the verb phrase” (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 94); that reported conversations are by no means always treated as new narrative developments, with the result that developmental markers might not normally attach to speech orienters (ibid.: 100);<sup>12</sup> that perfective aspect and ‘high transitivity’<sup>13</sup> correlate with foreground rather than background (ibid.: 79-80); that subordinate clauses most frequently present background rather than foreground (ibid.: 83); and last, that “[developmental markers] may also be attached to reference to participants, to indicate that the next development(s) will involve the participants concerned” (ibid.: 93).

#### 4 MEEGYE *BHE* AS A DEVELOPMENTAL MARKER

In Meegye narrative generally, I see a number of ways in which the use of *bhe* appears to fit reasonably well DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN’s cross-linguistic characterization of developmental markers. In this section, I enumerate, describe, and illustrate these ways, and I do so with reference to a variety of places where *bhe* does and does not occur in a number of oral tale narratives.

First and very quickly, the fact that *bhe* is a conjunction fits DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN’s characterization with regard to Meegye being VO.

Second, *bhe* does appear to me to mark most or all events in what I assume a narrator has intended as a tale’s event line.<sup>14</sup> I have found this normally true where the inferred event-line verb is an aspectually-unmarked, distal-past form—e.g., *odrwebwü* ‘she followed’ (with *-bwü* the distal-past tense suffix<sup>15</sup>), and perhaps invariably true where it is a proximate non-past, perfective form—e.g., *ekúa* ‘he has come; he came’ (with *-a* the proximate non-past tense suffix, and with perfective high tone on the vowel(s) of the verb’s root). (Once a tale’s base time has been established as the distal past (invariably so in my experience), then the proximate non-past, perfective appears normally able to replace it in the event line.) When *bhe* thus marks an event, it does so by joining itself, normally without pause, to the immediate left of the nuclear predication concerned. This puts it to the immediate left of this predication’s subject or verb, depending on the presence or not of an overt subject. (See, among others, examples (4a) and (11a) below.)

Third, at the same time that *bhe* appears to mark most events in the event line, it does *not* mark surrounding *nonevents*—e.g., material that is backgrounded in subordinate clauses of various types, or that is presented as irrealis. Nor does it mark repeated events described by habitual verb forms, presumably because such events are not regarded, after their initial tale performance, as new developments.<sup>16</sup> (See examples below.)

Fourth, *bhe* appears frequently to mark reference to a participant who is to be the different subject of the next development(s). When it does, the reference concerned is left-dislocated and normally set off by at least a slight pause from its nuclear predication. Thus, one may encounter *bhe* twice<sup>17</sup> in close proximity, the second time immediately after the left-dislocation and marking the event-line verb of which the marked participant is the subject. (See examples below.)

To illustrate these initial points from some extended material, one good set of example sentences is (4) through (7).<sup>18</sup> In these sentences, *bhe* occurs a total of eleven times: nine times to mark each of the set’s equal number of event-line verbs; the other two times to mark a different-subject reference—first to Chicken in (5a), then to the mongoose in (6a). The set’s only verb *not* marked by *bhe* is that of its only subordinate clause—viz., the purpose clause of (4d). Thus, ...

- (4a) *E kórúa óbhúlobhú,*  
DM 3P:wake:PN-P:PV SOBL:morning  
'So then they [Chicken and Mongoose] woke in the morning,
- (4b) *e kágba néhíe,*  
DM 3P:take:PN-P:PV SABS:way  
'and they set off on their way,
- (4c) *e kóá ú áteipwɔ,*  
DM 3P:go:PN-P:PV there SOBL:cultivated\_field  
'and they went to the field,
- (4d) *bhó ku nyedhi, ésélé múndé.*  
DC AUX 3PSS:plant PABS:peanuts  
'to plant the peanuts [they had prepared].
- (5a) *Bh'Aálé, bh'ogá, émúgélú ;*  
DM:Chicken DM:3S:chop:PN-P:PV PABS:holes  
'Then Chicken, she made holes ['chopping' them, as with a hoe];
- (5b) *bh'edhía néi bhándre né.*  
DM:3S:plant:PN-P:PV SABS:SPD home:3SPOSS SID  
'and she planted hers [either her peanuts, or else her side of the field].
- (6a) *Bhe néndéré, bh'óá nɔɔ sísó,*  
DM SABS:mongoose DM:3S:go:PN-P:PV in\_turn just\_so  
'Then the mongoose, he went in turn likewise,
- (6b) *bh'ogá émúgélú,*  
DM:3S:chop:PN-P:PV PABS:holes  
'and he made holes,
- (6c) *bh'edhía nábebeyé i bhándre né.*  
DM:3S:plant:PN-P:PV SABS:side SPD home:3SPOSS SID  
'and he planted his side [of the field].
- (7) *E kókúá ú bharí.*  
DM 3P:go\_home:PN-P:PV there (at)\_village  
'Then they went back home to the village.'

To illustrate again, examples (8) through (10)<sup>19</sup> show event-line verbs marked by *bhe* both before and after a sentence in which there is a succession of six habitual main verbs<sup>20</sup> not marked by *bhe*. These habituais describe an unspecified number of repetitions of a series of events that the tale's main participant has already performed an initial time earlier in the tale. (At this earlier point in the tale, the initial series of events is presented over a span of at least several sentences, not just one.) Also in (8) through (10), there are two subordinate temporal clauses not marked by *bhe*—viz., (9a) and (10a); and there is the marking of a different-subject reference—the appositive phrase *ándrandrö, Mánziadra* 'his wife, Manziadra'—in (10b).

- (8a) *Bh'agbá néhíε,*  
DM:3S:take:PN-P:PV SABS:way  
'Then he [Azapane] set off on his way,
- (8b) *bh'εkábwɔ.*  
DM:3S:come\_home:DP  
'and he came home.
- (9a) *A ɱ ogwá só né,*  
3S:be:PN-P right\_there 3S:see:PN-P thus SID  
'When he had seen [these things happen] thus,
- (9b) *ádhíngámε kpé, abaánga bhó náá,*  
PABS:times all 3S:DH:rise already just  
'each time, he would just get up,
- (9c) *máɔ,*  
3SUH:go  
'and he would go,
- (9d) *nyéédhu ébwɔ,*  
3SUH:gather PABS:edible\_caterpillars  
'he would gather caterpillars,
- (9e) *nyééká,*  
3SUH:come\_home  
'and he would come back,
- (9f) *nyéttá hε átogwo,*  
3SUH:pour 3PDO POBL:water  
'he would dump them out into the water,
- (9g) *nyáágba,*  
3SUH:begin  
'and he would begin
- (9h) *a n'ɔbha,*  
3S:be:PN-P SID:3S:dance:PN-P  
'dancing,
- (9i) *a n'ofa nólyá,*  
3S:be:PN-P SID:3S:cut:PN-P SABS:song  
'breaking into song,
- (9j) *a n'esía síísó né.*  
3S:be:PN-P SID:3S:do:PN-P just\_so SID  
'and doing just the same [as he had done before].
- (10a) *A bhó náá nėtiáne kana né,*  
3S:be:PN-P already just SABS:day one SID  
'Then one day,
- (10b) *bh'ándrandrɔ, Mánzíadra, bh'agbábwɔ néhíε,*  
DM:3SPOSS:wife Manziadra DM:3S:take:DP SABS:way  
'his wife, Manziadra, she set off on her way,
- (10c) *bh'odrwebwɔ nε ú dhato.*  
DM:3S:follow:DP 3SDO there (at)\_stream  
'and she followed him to the stream.'

Finally, illustrated in (12c) is a case of irrealis. Per the norm in my experience for such events that do not happen, it is not marked by *bhe*, in contrast with the series of surrounding events that are so marked.

- (11a) *Bhe* néndéré ekúa égye,  
DM SABS:mongoose 3S:come:PN-P:PV yonder  
'So then the mongoose came from there
- (11b) ándreísú a n'endria ne méndri né !  
3SPOSS:heart 3S:be:PN-P SID:3S:hurt:PN-P 3SDO VSR:hurt SID  
'very angry.
- (12a) *Bh*'ekúa,  
DM:3S:come:PN-P:PV  
'He came,
- (12b) *bh*'anyá náálé ;  
DM:3S:regard:PN-P:PV SABS:chicken  
'and he looked at the chicken;
- (12c) ka nói bhó ne  
NEG 3S:ask further 3SDO  
'he didn't question her any further,
- (12d) *bh*'odhá nóto étíé !  
DM:3S:fall:PN-P:PV 3SOBLO MAN:surely  
'he just fell upon her surely [i.e., such that escape was impossible],
- (12e) *bh*'opwúa ne !  
DM:3S:kill:PN-P:PV 3SDO  
'and he killed her,
- (12f) *bh*'onyá ne !  
DM:3S:eat:PN-P:PV 3SDO  
'and he ate her!'

Fifth (to resume now concerning *bhe*'s fit with Dooley and Levinsohn's cross-linguistic characterization), the use of *bhe* does appear naturally confined to tale sections of complicating action and resolution. Examples (13) and (14)<sup>21</sup> are the initial two lines of one tale, with *bhe*'s first deployment coming with the start of action in (14), after the (unmarked) introduction of the tale's main participant in (13). Example (15) is the post-resolution, final line of a different tale, and its not being marked by *bhe* is typical in my experience of the start of tale-section types that are not dominated by action. Although I have also seen *bhe* occur outside of such action sections, this has sometimes clearly been as a sentence-level conjunction rather than a developmental marker, and the other cases I would put aside for the moment as beyond the scope of the present paper.

- (13a) Nóólíóólí kana ín'abwɛ,  
SABS:ant one 3SEMP:3S:be:DP  
'There was a certain ant,
- (13b) ánerɛ bhó némakóté.  
3SPOSS:names DC SABS:[kind\_of\_ant]  
'its name makôté.
- (14a) *Bh*'aángábwɛ  
DM:3S:rise:DP  
'And he went

- (14b) *bh'ogíbwæ nándrɔ.*  
DM:3S:marry:DP SABS:wife  
'and married a wife.'
- (15) *Nátámbá i bhándrá né, ín'adúá æ.*  
SABS:tale SPD home:1SPOSS SID 3SEMP:3S:end:PN-P right\_there  
'My tale, it ends right there.'

Sixth, *bhe* does not often attach to speech orienters. When *bhe* is absent, this correlates I think invariably in my experience with the fact that the speech-orienter verb concerned is imperfective, being a proximate non-past form without perfective tone. Otherwise, with *bhe* present, the speech-orienter verb is a type of perfective, whether a distal past or a proximate non-past, perfective. Thus, as illustrated in examples (16), (17), and (18),<sup>22</sup> with each from a different tale section, ...

- (16) *Néndéré, ɔia Aálé bhó, ...*  
SABS:mongoose 3S:ask:PN-P Chicken DC  
'The mongoose asked [lit., 'asks'] Chicken, ...'
- (17) *Aálé, ɔdhya Ndéré ko bhó, ...*  
Chicken 3S:say:PN-P Mongoose SIO DC  
'Chicken said [lit., 'says'] to Mongoose, ...'
- (18) *Bh'Éimbɔɔ ɔdhyɔbwæ Ahí ko bhó, ...*  
DM:Blue\_Duiker 3S:say:DP Snail SIO DC  
'Then Blue Duiker said to Snail, ...'

However, while imperfective speech-orienter verbs unmarked by *bhe* do appear the norm for Meegye tales, I am not convinced that the reported conversations concerned are thereby necessarily intended as nonevents, or in fact backgrounded in any way vis-à-vis other tale developments. Indeed, such conversations strike me as very often more animated and interesting than their surrounding event line, and thus, if anything, as in some way foregrounded.<sup>23</sup> By hypothesis, then, and with some further interesting data and analysis in mind (see in the next section), a different means of marking a reported conversation as foregrounded—i.e., one different from that by which more normal, event-line foregrounding is normally marked by *bhe*—might be the combination of two things off-norm: 1) the use in the speech orienter of a more present(-time), animated verb form—viz., a(n) imperfective) proximate non-past verb, rather than a more normal perfective; plus 2) the absence of marking by *bhe*, as opposed to the positive, apparently more-or-less default event-line marking by it.

In sum, then, I believe that there is good reason to conclude that *bhe* does fit reasonably well Dooley and Levinsohn's cross-linguistic characterization of developmental markers. But this conclusion by no means addresses all the issues of *bhe*-related tale data, and it is to what appear to me the two most interesting of these that I turn in the paper's final main section.

## 5 TWO POSSIBLY-RELATED DISCOURSE PHENOMENA

*bhe* as a developmental marker does indeed mark at least most events in a given tale's main event line, one obvious question concerns why it does not always mark all. PAYNE 1992 addressed the same basic question with regard to the Yagua clitic *jǐ́íta*, and she answered it by recognizing for Yagua two kinds of main event line—viz., 'ordinary' and 'peak', with the 'ordinary' marked by *jǐ́íta*, and the 'peak' left unmarked. Something similar may need to be recognized as an option for Meegye, in order to account for those instances where *bhe*, at points that I see as intended climax or significant tension in certain tales, does not in fact mark as expected an event-line verb. The two kinds of event line concerned might then be distinguished as something like 'ordinary' vs. 'tense/peak'. Examples (19) and (20) illustrate this phenomenon. The brief tale concerned has its climax in (20b), unmarked by *bhe*, when Blue Duiker sees

Snail (actually, one of Snail's brothers) ahead of him at the finish line; the rest of the tale's event line has been marked by *bhe* throughout, except for a single point of significant tension earlier in the tale.

- (19) *Bh'Éimbəɔ agbábwə ɛngɔ síísó kpárá ɔana.*  
 DM:Blue\_Duiker 3S:take:DP PABS:running just\_so hard again  
 'So then Blue Duiker began running hard again just as before.
- (20a) *Abwə n'abɔdhyɔ bhó ndroópu bhó né,*  
 3S:be:DP SID:3S:DH:intend DC 3SSS:arrive already SID  
 'When he was just about to arrive [at the finish],
- (20b) *anyábwə bhó, Ahí,*  
 3S:regard:DP already Snail  
 'he saw Snail
- (20c) *a n'apá bhó ndrɛ égye né.*  
 3S:be:PN-P SID:3S:stand:PN-P:PV already 3SRFLX yonder SID  
 'already standing there yonder.'

A second question concerns a fact to which I have earlier alluded—viz., that there is more than one form of event-line verb. Besides the distal past (in which a tale is invariably set) and the proximate non-past, perfective (often seen to replace it), I have also noted more rarely, but in what I definitely see intended as the event line, both proximate perfect and proximate non-past forms. Thus, although a tale may be told with the entirety of its event line in the same distal past in which it begins, it is more common in my experience for it to change at some point from this, to some extent at least, to the proximate non-past, perfective, and even to some presumably-structured mix of the other forms as well. The overall movement among the forms appears according to what might need to be recognized as a kind of animation hierarchy, with the distal past at the one, least-animated extreme, and the proximate non-past at the other, most-animated. In between would be first the proximate non-past, perfective, then the proximate perfect, according to the relative distance from the present moment of events for which these forms are normally used in everyday conversation.<sup>24</sup> Examples (21) through (25), from various points in the same tale but in chronological order, would then illustrate one narrator's use of this hierarchy:

- (21) *Abwə nétiáne kana, ...*  
 3S:be:DP SABS:day one  
 'One day, ...' [lit., 'It was one day [long ago], ...']
- (22) *... e káagá nyɛ, ...*  
 DM 3P:understand:PN-P:PV 3PRFLX  
 '... they [Chicken and Mongoose] came to an agreement, ...'
- (23) *... káángesí, ékíní, sósɔa.*  
 3P:PP:do PABS:night four  
 '... they spent four days.'
- (24) *... káába, nésélémúndé i náálé bha né, ...*  
 3P:find:PN-P SABS:peanut SPD SABS:chicken village SID  
 '... they found the chicken's peanuts ...'
- (25) *E kóópúa, ...*  
 DM 3P:arrive:PN-P:PV  
 'Then they arrived, ...'

In (21), the tale is set in the distal past; in (22), there is the tale's initial shift to the more-animated proximate non-past, perfective; in (23), there is the initial further shift to the proximate perfect; in (24),

there is the initial further shift to the proximate non-past;<sup>25</sup> and in (25), there is a shift back to the less-animated, proximate non-past, perfective. The tale's climax, not included here for having appeared above as part of (12) (it is the sentence in which Mongoose kills and eats Chicken), is in the same proximate non-past, perfective.<sup>26</sup>

In relation to what I have said thus far in this section, there are two points I would especially add or emphasize. First, although the suggested two kinds of main event line ('ordinary' vs. 'tense/peak') and the suggested animation hierarchy are analytically separate, they obviously interrelate in text, and they do so in a manner that shows 'tense/peak' event line (unmarked by bhe) correlating quite closely with the top half of the animation hierarchy.<sup>27</sup> Second, there is little that is automatic or obligatory about what a narrator does with these things, which makes the possibilities virtually without limit, the scope for the skilled verbal artist immense—and the analysis of all of a given text's relevant pragmatics a challenge at the very least!

## 6 CONCLUSION

By way of a brief summary-conclusion, I would say first that, in my experience of Meegye tale narrative, bhe does indeed appear to fit reasonably well Dooley and Levinsohn's cross-linguistic characterization of developmental markers. Thus, I believe there is ample evidence that it does normally mark events in the event line, that it does not normally mark nonevents, and that it does often mark different-subject reference across clauses. Beyond this basic fit, I would suggest that bhe's marking most events in the event line may indicate a need to recognize for Meegye something like both 1) 'ordinary' vs. 'tense/peak' kinds of main event line, and 2) an animation hierarchy among event-line verb forms. With regard to all of this but especially these two suggestions, I would emphasize that space has not permitted me to deploy much data in support of what I have said, and my study of the matters concerned is in any case still in its youth. I readily acknowledge the need for further careful study of these matters with reference to a larger, more-completely-analyzed tale corpus than I have had available to date.

Second, I would note that recognizing bhe's function as a developmental marker has helped me understand why I have wanted to gloss it so variably in narrative—sometimes as 'and', 'then', or 'and then'; sometimes as a weak 'so', 'so then', or 'but'; even sometimes, in agreement with Larochette, as nothing. The fact is that its most natural-sounding gloss is a function of its highly variable discourse context.

Finally, as one still relatively new to discourse analysis, I would add that, whether or not my suggestions in this paper prove valid, I have found thinking about bhe as a developmental marker to be both stimulating and productive in a number of areas of grammatical investigation.

### Abbreviations

1S	first person, singular
2S	second person, singular
3S	third person, singular
3P	third person, plural
ANA	anaphoric
AUX	auxiliary
DC	discourse conjunction
DH	distal habitual
DM	developmental marker
DO	direct object
DP	distal past
EMP	emphatic (subject pronoun)
EP	evidential particle
LR	locative relator
MAN	manner

NEG	negative
OBLO	oblique object
PABS	plural absolutive
POBL	plural oblique
POSS	possessive
PP	proximate perfect
PN-P	proximate non-past
PV	perfective
RFLX	reflexive
SABS	singular absolutive
SID	singular intermediate demonstrative (glossed 'that' in normal demonstrative use)
SIO	singular indirect object postposition
SOBL	singular oblique
SPD	singular proximate demonstrative (glossed 'this' in normal demonstrative use)
SS	same subject (as that of the main verb)
UH	unmarked habitual
VSR	verb stem reduplication

## 7 REFERENCES

- Dooley, R.A. & S.H. Levinsohn (2001) *Analyzing Discourse: A Manual of Basic Concepts*. Dallas, TX: SIL International.
- Grimes, J.E. (1975) *The Thread of Discourse*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Larochette, J. (1958) *Grammaire des dialectes mangbetu et medje, suivi d'un manuel de conversation et d'un lexique*. Tervuren: Musée Royale du Congo Belge.
- McKee, R.G. (1991) 'Here', 'there', 'yonder' and beyond with Meje aspect. In: F. Rottland & L.N. Omondi (eds.), *Proceedings of the Third Nilo-Saharan Linguistics Colloquium*, Kisumu, Kenya, August 4-9, 1986. Hamburg: Helmut Buske Verlag. pp. 165-180.
- \_\_\_\_\_(1995) *Meje-Mangbetu (northeastern Zaire) death compensations as intergroup rites of passage: A structural, cultural, and linguistic study*. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Rochester.
- \_\_\_\_\_(2002) *Mangbetu orthography statement*. Manuscript (first revision). Nairobi: SIL-Eastern Congo Group.
- Payne, D.L. (1992) Narrative discontinuity versus continuity in Yagua. *Discourse Processes* 15. pp. 375-394.
- Vekens, A. (1928) *La langue des Makere, des Medje et des Mangbetu*. Gand: Editions Dominicaines 'Véritas'.

## 8 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The field research on which the paper is based has been concentrated in the 'southern' part of what I describe in MCKEE 1995 as the Meegye-Mangbetu area. It was carried out in relation to a SIL-assisted Bible translation project and sponsored by the CECCA/16 church *communauté* of the *Église du Christ au Congo*. My special thanks to each of the numerous Congolese friends and colleagues, only some of whom are named in the paper, who provided and helped transcribe and translate the tale texts that are the paper's primary data. I also thank Doris PAYNE for sending me a copy of her 1992 paper on Yagua *júta* after she had heard me present the conference version of this paper at Khartoum. Finally, I thank SIL colleagues Sara O'CONNOR and Mary Anne AUGUSTIN for proofreading the paper and attempting to help improve its style.

<sup>2</sup> Meegye is regarded by most outsiders as a dialect of Mangbetu. By the same outsiders' view, the Mangbetu language's other dialects are Mangbetu proper, Makere, Malele, Mapopoi, and Mabelu.

<sup>3</sup> See MCKEE 2002, which is a provisional Mangbetu orthography statement. The orthography concerned has been in process of development since the early 1980s, in the context of the church-sponsored Bible translation project already mentioned.

<sup>4</sup> *Bha* is the connective's only Mangbetu dialect form of which I am aware. Formally, *bha* is identical with the Mangbetu (language) noun stem variously glossed as 'village', 'residence', 'country', etc. I think it possible that *bha* as a Mangbetu connective and developmental marker has derived historically from the language's noun stem *bha*.

<sup>5</sup> Across word or morpheme boundaries in normal, connected Meegye speech, any 'non-high' vowel elides before a following 'non-high' vowel. In addition, although more might be said about variant and sub-variant forms, I do not believe any of it to be relevant to the paper's analysis of *bhe* as a developmental marker.

<sup>6</sup> VEKENS also wrote as *ba* the second-/third-person discourse conjunction that I believe occurs invariably in Meegye as *bhó*. I have noted this discourse conjunction to occur sometimes as *á* in texts collected in the 1980s from an elderly man of *Mapumé Kpóngbó* ethnic-descent status, which form would presumably have come from *bhá* in the same way that the Meegye sub-variants I have noted as *e* and *a* have come from *bhe* and *bha*.

<sup>7</sup> According to my own data, there is in Meegye a contrasting connective *be*, with the similarly-variant form *ba*, that occurs in contrafactual-conditional statements of the sort exemplified by the sentence *be múngangahe kabá kóópu né, be kabá nórá* 'if the doctors hadn't arrived, she [viz., a woman bitten by a large snake] wouldn't have recovered' (from a text by a man of *Meégyé Madula* ethnic-descent status, ca. April 1982). This contrasting connective does *not* function as a developmental marker. I see two sentences toward the end of one of VEKENS' tales in which this contrafactual-conditional connective appears clearly to occur (VEKENS 1928: 91).

<sup>8</sup> Meegye has more than one other use for *bhu*, and also another means of linking noun phrases that involves the instrument/accompaniment proclitic *áne-* with or without the postclitic *ro* (sg.)/*kóro* (pl.).

<sup>9</sup> All of the paper's examples are from my own field data, whether or not excerpted from taped tale texts. In each first example line, the transcription of its *Meegye data* is according to the provisional Mangbetu orthography of MCKEE (2002); this has not been edited to remove punctuation marks that reflect pauses and emphasis noted in taped texts; and all instances of *bhe* are marked in italics for ease of recognition. Concerning the *analysis* of each second line, there is a key to its abbreviations at the end of the paper, and I recognize that the analysis is not as complete at certain points as it might be. Concerning the *translation* of each third line, it is by intention rather free, including with regard to how *bhe* is translated.

<sup>10</sup> For anyone interested in the whole of DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN's cross-linguistic characterization of these markers, it is scattered to some extent, unfortunately, throughout their book, including in footnotes. For me, the brevity of the book and the stimulation of all they had to say made the effort involved in locating everything worthwhile.

<sup>11</sup> DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN acknowledge as their source for this particular set of categories W. LABOV (1972) *Language in the Inner City: Studies in the Black English Vernacular*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>12</sup> In this regard DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN say, "The verb of the speech orienter may be in the imperfective aspect or take some other marker that elsewhere tends to correlate with *backgrounded information*" (DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN 2001: 100, italics in the original). By 'speech orienter' they mean "an expression which indicates who is speaking to whom" (ibid.: 97), and they note 'quotation formula', 'speech margin', etc., as equivalent terms.

<sup>13</sup> 'High transitivity' here is in a sense developed in P.J. HOPPER and S.A. THOMPSON (1980) *Transitivity in grammar and discourse*, *Language* 56: 251-299. As summarized by DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN, a clause with high(er) transitivity is characterized by having or being the following: *two or more participants* (agent and object, vs. just one participant), *action* (vs. non-action), aspectually *telic* (vs. atelic), *punctiliar* (vs. durative), *volitional* (vs. non-volitional), *affirmative* (vs. negative), *realis* (vs. irrealis), agent *high in potency* (vs. low in potency), object *totally affected* (vs. not totally affected), and object *highly individuated* (vs. not individuated).

<sup>14</sup> In saying this, I do not pretend to imply that I have found identifying an event line to be a straightforward or non-circular process at every point in every Meegye narrative I have examined. Thus, in at least one tale, I have identified what I take to be the first occurrences of *bhe* as a developmental marker in what still looks to me to be the orientation section, before the start of the event line; in some others, I have wound up inferring narrator intent as to where the event line begins solely on the basis of an initial deployment of *bhe*; and in a number of cases, whether or not definitely into the event line, I cannot see that every main verb marked by *bhe* can be regarded by any means as an *equally*-new narrative development or *of equal weight* as such (e.g., (14a) of this paper's examples, in which the verb glossed 'rise' seems to me to have no more semantic weight than an auxiliary). Whatever the case, I am for

now treating all such difficulties as analytical challenges rather than as reasons to stop exploring the idea of *bhe* as a developmental marker.

<sup>15</sup> Meegye has three past tenses, which I have classified as ‘proximate’, ‘intermediate’, and ‘distal’; and it also has three *non*-past tenses, which I have thus classified the same.

<sup>16</sup> Analytically, where the *aspect* of such habituals is concerned, this is, by comparison with that of event-line verbs marked by *bhe*, imperfective and atelic, and thus also is their transitivity lower (see again, in a previous note, DOOLEY and LEVINSOHN’s summary of HOPPER and THOMPSON’s notion of ‘high transitivity’).

<sup>17</sup> I have in fact seen *bhe* occur in such close proximity as many as *three* times—e.g., in another sentence from the Chicken and Mongoose tale (see below) that starts *Bhe néndéré, bh’ándreísú, bh’aátíngíliá ndre, ...* ‘Then the mongoose, his heart, it became tied up, ...’.

<sup>18</sup> The tale concerned is about how Chicken and Mongoose became enemies. The taped version of it that I have was recounted to me by a Roman Catholic lay pastor, *Ábini* Thomas, in October 2001 at Egbita mission. In terms of ethnic-descent status, Thomas is *Mapumé Megé*. Other paper examples from the same tale are (11) and (12), (15), (16), (17), and (21) through (25). The noun stem *ndéré* actually refers to just one of a number of named kinds of mongoose.

<sup>19</sup> The tale concerned is one in which the Mangbetu trickster and culture hero *Azapane* plays the buffoon. The taped version of it that I have was recounted to me by *Misa Amúbwɔ mombé* Réginard, in February 2000 at Egbita mission. In terms of ethnic-descent status, Réginard is *Meégyé Mangbó*. At present, he is a secondary school *préfet* in Isiro.

<sup>20</sup> Meegye has two habitual verb forms, one of them marked for tense, the other not. The one not marked for tense I have only observed in natural text or conversation in a third-person singular form that is formally identical with the dialect’s second-person singular subjunctive/(hortative), which is thus a rather highly marked form in terms of lack of referential transparency. See in MCKEE 1991 for a brief treatment of Meegye’s habituals in relation to Meegye aspect more generally.

<sup>21</sup> The tale concerned is about how a kind of ant with the Meegye name *makóte* got its particular body shape. The taped version of it that I have was recounted to me by a young married man named *Ndéke*, in November 1987 at his Egbita village compound. In terms of ethnic-descent status, *Ndéke* (d. 19 September 2001) was *Meégyé Meika Ogbó*.

<sup>22</sup> For example (18), the tale concerned is one in which Snail challenges Blue Duiker to a race and wins by superior cunning. The taped version from which this example is drawn was recounted to me by *Abhule Kabwu nótu bha ɔdhyɔ* Victor Colin, in March 1986 at Egbita mission. At present, he is a pastor and the president of the CECCA/16 church *communauté*. Other paper examples from the same tale are (19) and (20).

<sup>23</sup> Such *foregrounding* of reported conversation seems to me more consistent with what I have noted elsewhere (see MCKEE 1995: 132-133) about people appearing to place a high value on verbal/oratorical skills and their public display.

<sup>24</sup> Thus, the proximate non-past, perfective *nyéngá* of example (1) has a more-distant-past, less-animated time reference than that of the proximate perfect *míngengá* ‘you(sg.) have risen’. The latter is commonly used, when appropriate, to greet someone from one’s own closer surroundings, with the assumption that the act involved has occurred very recently. By contrast, use of the former, including in a greeting such as *Nyéngá sí égye!* ‘You(sg.) have come from yonder!’, assumes that the act involved—of rising and thus originating from—has taken place at a more-distant physical and temporal remove.

<sup>25</sup> In my experience, event-line verbs that are proximate non-past are often verbs of perception or discovery—e.g., *ogwó* ‘see’, *anya* ‘regard’, *aábe* ‘find’, or *aámbwu* ‘find’. It is *not* that such verbs do not occur in other forms in a tale’s event line (they do in fact so occur). I think probably involved, to some extent at least, are cultural values concerned on the one hand with duplicity, trickery, etc. (the Mangbetu trickster and culture hero *Azapane* is much admired for his wiliness), and on the other with the discovery of things hidden (cf. MCKEE 1995: 125-126).

<sup>26</sup> Some of what is possible grammatically in Meegye would appear to me to facilitate the working of such a hierarchy. Thus, in addition to tense-inflected habitual forms such as *abaánga* ‘he would get up’ (see again in example (9b)) having a tenseless possible substitute *nyáánga*, the distal-past negative *kabwu nóti* ‘he didn’t ask’ has the more-animated possibility *ka nóti* (see again in (12c)) and the distal-past completive *aábekpɔkpɔ* ‘he (over time) became big’ has the more-animated *angékpɔkpɔ* (see again in MCKEE 1991 concerning Meegye’s completive forms). In my experience, if/when a narrator has shifted from the distal past to the proximate non-past, perfective in a tale’s event line, she or he then at least normally uses the more animated of the above forms as a matter of consistency/cohesion.

---

<sup>27</sup> Although space does not permit me to begin to try to demonstrate this point from examples, I see it at least suggested by where *bhe* is and is not deployed in (22) through (25) (with (21) beginning the orientation section of the tale concerned, before the start of its event line).