

# Spoken and written Teop: syntactic changes in the edited written versions of oral narratives

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Several linguists have expressed their concern with respect to putting spoken language into writing during the documentation of predominantly spoken languages because this enterprise would create a new genre that is foreign to the documented language and culture (Foley, Mühlhäusler, Woodbury). However, speech communities may want to produce written versions of their recordings as means of transmitting their knowledge to future generations and for the use of educational materials. When this happened in the Teop language documentation project, we felt obliged to comply with the wishes of the speech community, but tried to raise the awareness of the danger of modelling the new written variety of language on the dominant languages of Tok Pisin and English.

The present paper compares the syntactic structure of forty recorded oral narratives with their edited versions and identifies two kinds of syntactic processes which we call *syntactic compression* and *syntactic elaboration*. The processes of syntactic compression include:

- the replacement of parenthetical sequences of clauses by clause chaining constructions, complex sentences with embedded clauses, and serial verb constructions;
- the promotion of adjuncts by the increase of the valency of the verb complex through the incorporation of prepositions.

The process of syntactic elaboration leads to more complex structures by the addition of

- adjectival phrases as adnominal modifiers;
- modifying serial verbs;
- adverbials.

All constructions resulting from compression or elaboration are also found in the recordings. In a few cases we even find a compressed construction in a recording that is replaced by a parenthetical construction in the edited version.

The process of editing reveals natural (not elicited) transformational equivalents of constructions and genuinely reflects the native speaker's metalinguistic knowledge. Furthermore, the edited versions enlarge the corpus with data which often show syntactically more complex structures than their oral equivalents.

In conclusion, the enterprise of editing spoken narratives is not only justified from the speech community's point of view, but also from a purely linguistic perspective.