

III

Becoming a Competent Speaker of Malagasy

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we will describe some of the major adaptations that a native speaker of a Western European language, like English, must experience in order to become a competent speaker of Malagasy, the language of Madagascar. Our understanding of these adaptations comes from our own experience, as we spent a year living in a peasant village in Madagascar precisely for the purpose of learning the language.

To be a competent speaker of a language in any culture, one must be able to perform successfully those social acts that require the use of language. This entails that a speaker be able to produce simple sentences and that he be able to apply those processes that form more complex

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FIGURE 3.1 The authors with the Razotovo family, who helped them find a residence in a small village and often served as language consultants. On the occasion of a visit to town (Antsirabe) June, 1970.

sentences from simpler ones. And the production of simple sentences requires that we know both the basic vocabulary of the language and which combinations of the vocabulary items yield understandable phrases and sentences. And finally, of course, we must know the basic sounds of the language and which combinations of sounds yield admissible words and phrases.

Competence in a language, however, requires much more than merely being able to form understandable sentences. A machine, however cleverly disguised as a human, which could only produce well-formed sentences on a random basis, would not be able, in general, to joke, tease, bargain, ask a favor, perform ritual oratory, or even, as we shall see, exchange ordinary information in a socially normal way.

To be a competent speaker of Malagasy (or of any language) then, one must be able to adhere to the complex norms of the society concerning language use in particular and personal interaction in general.

In the first part of the discussion to follow we shall concentrate on those aspects of word and sentence formation that are most novel to native speakers of English and hence require the greatest adaptation on their part. Later we shall discuss several social norms that make language behavior quite different from that prevalent in middle-class

American society. (We will have little to say about the sound system of Malagasy, as it presents few major difficulties for an English speaker. Malagasy sentences will be presented in the standard writing system, which corresponds overall quite closely to the pronunciation system. Occasional notes on spelling conventions will point out the few discrepancies.) First, however, we make some general remarks about the situation of the Malagasy people and language.

1 BACKGROUND

Malagasy, spoken in eighteen major dialects throughout the island of Madagascar (the large island off the east coast of Africa), constitutes a subgroup of the Austronesian family of languages (also called Malayo-Polynesian), and thus has a common ancestry with the languages of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Polynesia (see Figure 3.2). Our best evidence indicates that Madagascar was peopled early in the first millennium A.D. by settlers coming from somewhere in the Indonesian part of the world, probably travelling along the coast of the Indian Ocean, down the east coast of Africa, and across the Mozambique channel to what is now called Madagascar (or internationally, the Malagasy Republic—the name Madagascar itself is probably of Portuguese origin). Trade along these routes was largely controlled by the Arabs, and the first references we have to the Malagasy people come from Arab sources of this period. The Malagasy language itself attests to many obvious Arabic borrowings such as the days of the week: *Atalata* “Tuesday,” *Alarobia* “Wednesday,” etc. In fact the first writing in Malagasy was done in an Arabic script, although it never gained widespread use.

The first substantial European contact came through the English missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. They established the current writing system, and several Malagasy words pertaining to writing or Protestant Christianity derive from this influence, for example, *boky* from “book,” *pastaora* from “Pastor,” etc. In fact the spelling convention whereby the long *ee* sound is written as *y* at the end of a word, as in *boky* above, derives from English influence. In the interior of a word, this sound is written *i*.

At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the French took over colonial control of Madagascar, and some of the current technical and administrative vocabulary of Malagasy as well as that of Catholic Christianity, derives from French sources, for example *savony* from French *savon* “soap,” *mompéra* “priest” from French *mon père* “my father.” It is interesting to note, however, that despite the onslaught of European culture in the twentieth century, Malagasy has overall borrowed relatively few words from European languages. As we shall see,

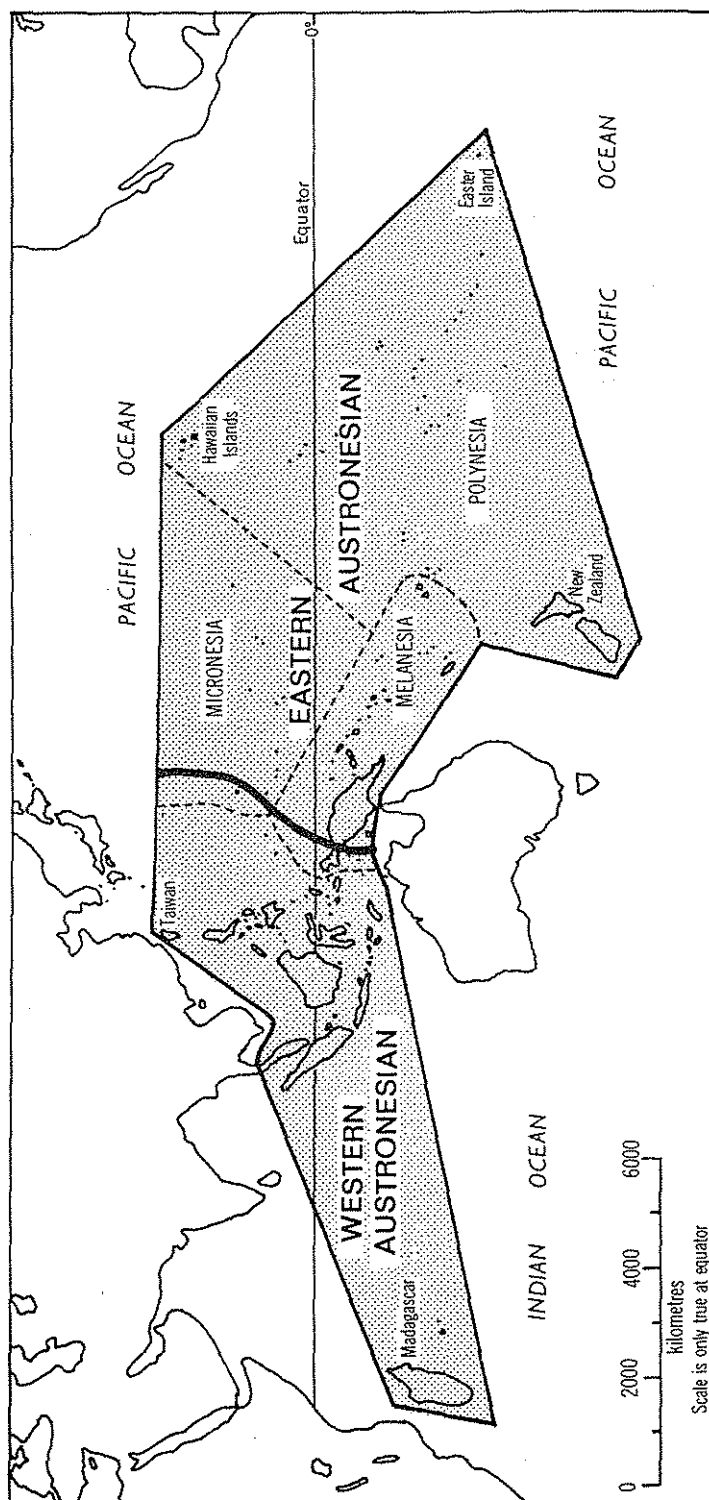


FIGURE 3.2 The Area Within Which Austronesian Languages Are Spoken. There are also several Austronesian languages spoken by minority groups in the southern part of Vietnam.

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the structure of the Malagasy language enabled it to coin many of its words in a natural way for objects and activities of European origin. Currently, for example, schoolbooks in subjects such as geometry are written in Malagasy using largely words native to Malagasy.

2 FORMING SENTENCES IN MALAGASY

2.1 Simple Sentences

Let us consider a simple declarative sentence like (1) below, which might be used to express a statement of fact.

- (1) *manasa ny lamba amin'ity savony ity Rasoa*
 wash the clothes with this soap this Rasoa
 Rasoa is washing the clothes with this soap.

Under the Malagasy sentence we have put a word-for-word translation and then given the most natural translation in everyday English. Sentence (1) presents several striking differences from its English translation. In the first place, the verb occurs in initial position and is followed by the major noun phrases. This is already unusual; probably not more than 10 percent of the world's languages place the verb in initial position in simple (unemphatic) sentences. (The most common position for the verb is in the final position, as in Japanese, Hindi, and Basque. A close second in terms of frequency is for the verb to occur in second position, preceded by the subject of the sentence, as in English, modern Hebrew, and Swahili. Together these two word order types account for about 90 percent of the world's languages.)

Even more unusual, however, is the fact that in Malagasy the subject phrase, for example *Rasoa*, a woman's name in (1), occurs in sentence final position. At most, about a dozen of the world's five-thousand-odd languages are known to regularly place the subject in final position. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the subject phrase in Malagasy is in any way less important in Malagasy sentence construction than, for example, the subject phrase in English. As in English, Malagasy subjects refer to the doer of the action, or as we shall say, the *agent*, in cases where the verb expresses an action (like *wash*, as opposed to, say, *need*). And as in English, the subject normally refers to the main thing the speaker is talking about, or as we shall say, the *topic* of the sentence. Thus in (2) and (3) below, although the main predicate does not express an action, the subject phrase still expresses the topic of discussion and occurs in the final position of the sentence.

- (2) *mpandrafitra any Antsirabe Rabe*
 carpenter there Antsirabe Rabe
 Rabe is a carpenter in Antsirabe.

- (3) *tany Antsirabe ny mpampianatra*
there Antsirabe the teacher

The teacher was in Antsirabe.

Further, as we shall see, much of the syntax of complex sentences in Malagasy depends on the behavior of subject phrases. Before considering this dependency, however, let us consider how to form verbs and noun phrases in order to combine them as illustrated in (1)–(3) to form simple sentences.

2.1.1 *Verbs* In several respects, the structure of Malagasy verbs seems quite simple compared to that of English. For example, in English and many European languages, the form of the verb varies with the person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) of the subject. Thus we say “I sing” but “John sings,” and “I am singing,” but “we are singing.” But in Malagasy the verb does not change form depending on the person and number of the subject. Thus “I sing” (or “I am singing”) is *mihira aho* (lit.: “sing I”), and “John sings” or “John is singing” is *mihira Rajaona* (lit.: “sing John”), and “we sing” or “we are singing” is *mihira izahay* (lit.: “sing we”).

As a second example, consider that English verbs may occur in a bewildering variety of forms together with auxiliary (or ‘helping’) verbs like “be,” “have,” and “do.” Thus from a simple verb like “sing” we have “John sings, is singing, sang, did sing, has sung, was singing, will sing, will be singing, will have sung,” etc. But in Malagasy there are no auxiliary verbs like “be,” “have,” and “do.” In fact there is no simple verb “to be” at all. Tense, then, is indicated very simply by the initial consonant on the verb. Almost all present-tense verbs begin with *m-* (as *manasa* “wash” and *mihira* “sing” above). To form the past tense, simply replace the initial *m-* by *n-* (e.g. *nihira aho*, “I sang”). And to form the future, replace the initial *m-* by *h-*. Thus *hihira aho* is “I will sing.” Further, Malagasy verbs do not distinguish progressive from nonprogressive forms (e.g. “I am singing” from “I sing”). Both receive the same translation in Malagasy, although if it is important to stress that an action is continuing, one can use independent adverbs like *mbola* “still.” Thus to indicate that someone is in the process of singing now and hasn’t yet stopped, you might say (4) below.

- (4) *mbola mihira izy*
still sing he

He is (still) singing.

Given a simple sentence like (5) below, the reader should now be able to form the Malagasy equivalents of “I drink milk,” “I am still drinking

milk,” “John drank milk,” “John was drinking milk,” “He will drink milk,” and “He will be drinking milk.”

- (5) *misotro ronono izahay*
drink milk we

We are drinking milk.

However, while some aspects of Malagasy verb structure appear simpler than English, others are clearly much more complex. The learner of Malagasy will be frustrated to find that almost none of the simple present-tense forms of verbs occurs as such in the Malagasy dictionaries (and there are some excellent ones). The reason is that verbs are in general formed by prefixing elements to what we shall call *roots*. For example, *mihira* “sing” is formed by adding the prefix *mi-* to the root *hira* meaning “song.” There are about a dozen such prefixes, and most of them can combine with most roots to form verbs. So dictionaries simply list the roots and indicate which prefixes may apply and what the meaning of the derived verb is. Thus to look up a verb in the dictionary, it is necessary to be able to determine its root. In the case of *mihira* above, the problem is simple. Once we know that *mi-* is one of the verb-forming prefixes, we may assume that the rest of the verb is the root. And further, *hira*, the rest of the verb in this case, occurs as a noun with the meaning “song,” so it is a form we know independently in the language.

But a more usual case is illustrated by *manasa* “wash.” Here the prefix is *man-* and the root is *sasa*. *Sasa* does not occur independently in the language as a word, and further, when the prefix *man-* is added, the initial consonant *s-* of the root is lost. So we cannot simply read off the root form by eliminating the prefix from *manasa* for that would yield only *asa*, which is not the root. Thus, to find *manasa* in the dictionary, it might appear as though we would have to look up all roots of the form *Xasa* where *X* is any consonant (we would also have to check for a root *asa*, since a root beginning with a vowel does not change in any way when the prefix *man-* is added).

Fortunately our dictionary checking does not have to be quite this tedious, for not just any consonant at the beginning of a root is dropped. The ones most commonly dropped are *f*, *h*, *k*, *p*, *t*, and *s*. For example, *man-* + the root *tolotra* = *manolotra* “to offer,” *man-* + *hadino* = *manadino* “to forget,” etc. On the other hand, consonants like *g*, *b*, *d*, and *z* as well as *l* and *r* at the beginning of roots are not dropped when *man-* is added, although certain other changes in pronunciation may take place. For example, while *man* + *dinika* = *mandinika* “to study,” we have *mandroso* “to progress” from *man* + *roso* and *mandeha* “to go” from *man* + *leha*, etc.

What principle can you give to describe, on the basis of the data at

hand, those consonants that drop and those that don't?¹ Given the following roots, form the corresponding verbs:

man- + sorata	= <u>sorata</u>	"to write"
man- + araka	= <u>araka</u>	"to follow"
man- + haja	= <u>haja</u>	"to respect"
man- + kaikitra	= <u>kaikitra</u>	"to bite"
man- + lefa	= <u>lefa</u>	"to send"

Of the many verbal prefixes in Malagasy, *mi-* and *man-* are the most commonly occurring ones that apply directly to roots (although there are several others). And many roots accept both prefixes, in which case the verb formed from *mi-* usually has an intransitive meaning, and the one formed from *man-* has a transitive meaning. Thus from *sasa* we form the transitive *manasa* "to wash (something)" and also *misasa* "to wash (oneself)." And from *araka* we form the transitive *manaraka* "to follow (someone)" and the intransitive *miaraka* "to be or go together with."

However, even when we have formed verbs from *mi-* or *man-*, it is still possible to add further prefixes to the derived verb. In this case the initial *m-* of *mi-* or *man-* is dropped and the new prefix added. Thus from *manasa* "to wash (something)" we could add the reciprocal prefix *mif-* yielding *mifanasa* "to wash each other." Or we could add the causative prefix *mamp-* yielding *mampanasa* "to cause (someone) to wash (something)" and so on.

It should be clear then that verbal structure in Malagasy is quite complex, though in a different way from English. Furthermore, the complexity we have discussed so far only concerns active verbs, that is, ones in which the subject/topic is the agent of the action. But as we shall see, Malagasy, like the languages of the Philippines, has elaborate ways of making nonagents into subject/topics, much as the passive voice in English ("John was hit by Mary" is the passive form of "Mary hit John") makes a nonagent into the subject/topic of the derived sentence since "John" is not the agent of the action. Rather it is he who undergoes the action, or as we shall say, is the *patient* of the action.

2.1.2 Nouns As with the formation of verbs in Malagasy, we find that the formation of nouns lacks certain of the complexities associated with nouns in European languages. For example, Malagasy nouns do not in general change form according to whether they refer to one or many

things. Thus *ny akoho* would translate, word for word, as either "the chicken" or "the chickens." Further, Malagasy lacks the gender system of languages like German and French. We don't have to know in Malagasy whether nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. Malagasy also lacks the case system of European languages. Thus, in general, we do not have one form of a noun (the nominative case form) if it functions as a subject and another form if it functions as an object. Compare for example (6) and (7) in which the two noun phrases in each sentence have the same form, differing only in position.

- (6) *nahita ny voalavo ny akoho*
saw the rat the chicken
The chicken saw the rat.

- (7) *nahita ny akoho ny voalavo*
saw the chicken the rat
The rat saw the chicken.

On the other hand, Malagasy nouns do evidence a complexity of a different sort. While many common nouns are themselves roots in the language, a great many others that name common objects of everyday use are derived from more basic structures. We consider here a few types.

Notice that proper names of people we have mentioned so far, *Rabe*, *Rasoa*, *Rajaona* all begin with *Ra-*. *Ra-* in fact is a prefix that indicates that the construction in which it occurs is a proper name. (This use of *Ra-* is largely limited to the major dialect of Malagasy, *Merina*. It is used for men's or women's names, but not for children's. For a child's name, one uses the prefix *I-*). What follows *Ra-* is either an adjective or a verb phrase. Thus *be* is an adjective meaning "big," so *Rabe* might be translated as "Mr. Big." Similarly *soa* is an adjective meaning "beautiful," so *Rasoa* might be translated as "Ms. Beautiful." (Note that *jaona* in *Rajaona* has no Malagasy meaning. It is simply the name "John" borrowed from English, but the particle *Ra-* is still added because it functions as a proper name.) For reasons of space the adjectives we have used in proper names have been short ones, but typical Malagasy names are quite long and may contain whole verb phrases. Thus *Ramanandraibe* is about an average-length name and 'means' "Mr.-have-father-big" (*Ra-manana-rai-be*). Further, the systematic way of forming proper names from *Ra-* + predicates allows one to refer to someone with a name he has just made up using a predicate that is appropriate to the immediate situation. This is occasionally done in English, as when we say things like "Mr. Blabbermouth," although such use is unusual, perhaps childish. But in a Malagasy village, we might easily refer to an old white-haired woman whom we see in the fields but don't know as *Rafotsy* (Ms. White).

¹In general, roots that begin with unvoiced consonants, that is those that are not produced by making a noise with the vocal cords, like *t* as opposed to *d* or *k* as opposed to *g* etc., are dropped when the prefix *man-* is added. Roots beginning with voiced consonants generally either leave the consonant intact when *man-* is added or else change it in fairly systematic ways, e.g., *l* becomes *d* as in *mandeha* "to go" from *man-* + *leha*.

In addition to names of people, names of places are also all derived from other words in the language. The most common formula here is *an-* (a particle indicating location), followed by a common noun, followed by one or more adjectives. For example, in sentences (2) and (3) the name of the town *Antsirabe* was used. But this word really has three parts: The locative particle *an-*, the noun *sira* "salt," and the adjective *be* "big." *Antsirabe* is so named because of the many mineral springs located there. Similarly the capital of Madagascar, *Tananarive*, is in Malagasy *Antananarivo*, which decomposes into *an-* (locative particle) + *tanana* "village or country" + *arivo* "thousand." It is so named as it was a stopping point for a thousand soldiers during an early battle in the history of Madagascar.

Nouns that refer to locations exhibit another interesting property in Malagasy. Recall again sentence (2), *mpandrafitra any Antsirabe Rabe*, which is, word for word, "carpenter there Antsirabe Rabe." Locative nouns, whether common or proper, are obligatorily accompanied by an independent locative word like *any* "there." It is rather as though in English we could not say "John is a carpenter in Boston" but rather had to say "John is a carpenter there in Boston." The use of locative words like *any* "there" might seem redundant since, after all, it is already clear that nouns like *Antsirabe* name places. But in fact such locative words contain much information.

In the first place, *any* is but one of seven such locative words that could have been used in (2). And each such word indicates that the locative noun that follows it is at a greater or lesser distance from the speaker. Thus *any Antsirabe* means that Antsirabe is rather far from the speaker, but *aroa Antsirabe* would mean it was still farther, and *ary Antsirabe* would mean very far indeed. On the other hand, *atsy Antsirabe* would mean that Antsirabe was somewhat closer to the speaker, *ato* would mean closer yet, and *aty* would clearly mean that the speaker was in Antsirabe at the moment of speaking. Compare this to English with its twofold distinction in locative words—"here" vs. "there."² And since the use of these locative words is obligatory with place names, the European speaker who learns Malagasy must quickly learn to make many more judgments of relative distance than he is used to. Yet we have just begun to note the complexity in the use of locative particles!

In addition to marking seven degrees of relative distance, locative particles in Malagasy also mark whether the location referred to is visible to the speaker or not. All the locative words used so far indicate

²There is a seventh form, *ao*, which has a slightly specialized meaning. It not only means fairly close, occurring between *atsy* and *ato* in the series, but also usually implies "inside of something." Its use would not then be appropriate when referring to a city, which does not, by its nature, occur inside anything else.

that the location, Antsirabe, is not visible to the speaker. To indicate visibility, we simply change the initial *a-* of the locative word to *e-*. Thus had we said *eny Antsirabe* instead of *any Antsirabe*, that would mean that Antsirabe was pretty far away, but that the speaker could see it. Thus instead of merely seven locative particles we actually have fourteen! And our complications are still not over.

Note sentence (3) *Tany Antsirabe ny mpampianatra*, which we glossed word-for-word as "there Antsirabe the teacher." But the locative word *tany* is not one of those we have already considered. It looks like *any* except that it begins with a *t-*. Also, its meaning is close to that of *any* in that it indicates a fairly great distance and lack of visibility to the speaker. But in addition, the prefix *t-* indicates past tense so that the sentence means "The teacher was in Antsirabe." Had we said *Any Antsirabe ny mpampianatra*, we would have meant that the teacher is now in Antsirabe. And had we said *Ho any Antsirabe*... we would have meant that the teacher will be in Antsirabe. Note that in the English translations of these sentences, the tense marking is carried by the form of the verb "to be" ("is" for present, "was" for past, "will be" for future). But as we have seen, Malagasy has no such verb. And in sentences like those above, we feel no need for such a verb since the principal meaning that "to be" has there is to mark the time of the state referred to, and in Malagasy this is done by marking the locative particle. As all fourteen of the locative particles may occur with *ho-* or *t-* prefixed, we have in fact forty-two such forms from which a learner of Malagasy has to choose at a moment's notice when speaking!

We might also mention that words like "where," which question location may also be marked for tense. Thus *Aiza Rabe?* would mean "Where is Rabe?" whereas *Taiza Rabe?* would mean "Where was Rabe?" and *Ho aiza Rabe?* would mean "Where will Rabe be?" Even certain prepositions in Malagasy may be marked for past tense in this way. Thus if we put sentence (1) in the past tense, changing *manasa* to *nanasa*, we must change the present tense form of the preposition *amin-* "with" to *tamin-* "with (in the past)."

Finally we should note that the complex distance discriminations that are made in the system of locative particles extends as well to the system of demonstrative adjectives and pronouns. Here again English makes only a two-way distinction, "this" vs. "that." But Malagasy makes, in this case, a six-way distinction. Thus in sentence (1) the use of *ity* in *ity savony ity* "this soap" indicates that the soap is in the immediate presence of the speaker. The reader will note that the demonstrative adjective occurs on both sides of the noun phrase it modifies. For example, if the noun phrase contains an adjective, the demonstratives frame the noun + adjective construction, as in *ity trano fotsy ity* (literally, "this house white this") for *this white house*. On the other hand *io savony io* would mean the soap is somewhat farther away,

itsy savony itsy still farther away, *iny savony iny* rather far indeed, *iroa savony iroa* still farther yet, and *iry savony iry* would mean that the soap is so far away from the speaker that he probably could not see it, so the use of this demonstrative would be bizarre, since the meaning of the demonstrative includes the idea that it is present to the speaker. Thus the visible/nonvisible marking is not so clearly differentiated in the demonstrative adjective series. It is possible nonetheless to infix -za- into most of the demonstrative adjectives, in which case the item need not be visible to the speaker. Thus from *io* we have *izao*, from *iny* we have *izany*, etc., but this infixing process is only of limited productivity.

Let us return now to some of the other ways of forming noun phrases. One common way is to replace the initial *m-* of a present-tense active verb (one in which the subject is the agent) by *mp-*. The resulting noun denotes "one who performs the action expressed by the verb." Thus from *manasa* we form *mpanasa* "one who washes," and from *mihira* we form *mpihira* "one who sings." Note that in sentence (2) the word for carpenter is such an agent noun. Thus from the root *rafitra* "something constructed" we add the *man-* prefix to form *mandrafitra* "to build, put together" and thence the agent noun *mpandrafitra* "carpenter, mason," etc. Such nouns are easy to form, but once again they are difficult to find in a dictionary, for in order to look them up, we must know the verb from which they are formed; and to find the meaning of the verb, we must know the root from which it is formed.

A second common way of forming nouns is by replacing the initial *m-* of active present-tense verbs with *f-*. Here the meaning of the derived noun is less systematically related to the meaning of the verb from which it is derived. But usually such nouns refer to some object closely associated with the action expressed by the verb. Thus from the root *vaki* "broken" we form the transitive verb *mamaky* "to cut, chop" (note that an initial *v-* in a root changes the *n-* of the prefix *man-* to *m*) whence we form *famaky* "hatchet." From the root *zaitra* we form *manjaitra* "to sew," whence we have *fanjaitra* "needle." (The *j* in Malagasy is pronounced like "dz" together.) Once again, then, to determine the meanings of such nouns, commonly used for names of everyday objects, it is necessary to be able to determine the meaning of verbs.

A final and even more productive way of forming nouns is based on what we shall call the circumstantial form of verbs. 'Circumstantial' here contrasts with active and passive. In an active verb, the agent is the subject. In a passive verb an object, usually the patient, is the subject. And in a circumstantial verb the subject is some circumstance of the action, such as the place or time at which the action was performed, the manner or purpose of the action, the instrument with which the action was performed, or the person for whose benefit the action was per-

formed. Consider for example sentence (1), for convenience repeated as (8) below.

- (8) *manasa ny lamba amin'ity savony ity Rasoa*
 wash the clothes with this soap this Rasoa
 Rasoa is washing clothes with this soap.

The verb in (8) is active, so the subject *Rasoa* denotes the agent of the action. In (9) below, however, the verb is passive and the subject, *ny lamba* "the clothes" is the patient of the action.

- (9) *sasan-dRasoa amin'ity savony ity ny lamba*
 washed-by-Rasoa with this soap this the clothes
 The clothes are washed by Rasoa with this soap.

Note that in (9) the derived subject *ny lamba* "the clothes" occurs in sentence final position where subjects in Malagasy go. The agent phrase in this sentence tacks onto the end of the verb in a characteristic and rather complicated way. (The passive form of the verb without an agent tacked on would be *sasana*, formed by adding -*na* to the root *sasa*. But when we put in the agent phrase, the final *a* of *sasana* drops. This should yield a form like *sasan-Rasoa*. But in Malagasy *n* never occurs directly before *r*. In such cases a *d* is then inserted, yielding in this case *sasan-dRasoa*.)

Now, in the same way that passive verbs take patients as subjects, so circumstantial verbs take as subjects nouns that refer to some circumstance of the action. Thus in (10) below *ity savony ity* "this soap" is the subject.

- (10) *anasan-dRasoa ny lamba ity savony ity*
 wash-with-by-Rasoa the clothes this soap this
 This soap is washed clothes with by Rasoa. (Or in more natural English, "This soap is used by Rasoa to wash clothes".)

Again the derived subject "this soap" occurs in sentence final position and loses its preposition *amina* since subject phrases never occur with prepositions.

The circumstantial form of the verb is derived from the active form (not directly from the root as is the case with passive forms) by deleting the initial *m-* and adding the suffix -*ana*, moving the stress to the right. So from *mánasa*, which has the stress on *man-*, we form *anasa + ana* (two *a* sounds together collapse into a single *a* sound), which yields *anasána* with the stress on the *sa*. As with passive forms, when circumstantial forms combine with an agent phrase beginning with *r-*,

the final *a* drops and a *d* is inserted yielding the form we see in (10). How deceiving was the original apparent simplicity of the Malagasy verb!

Now we may, and very commonly do, form nouns from circumstantial verbs simply by adding *f-*. The resulting noun refers to some circumstance of the action indicated by the verb, such as the purpose, place, time, manner, etc. Thus from *anasana*, the circumstantial form of *manasa*, we can form *fanasana*, which might be used to refer to the manner of washing. In such cases we may still retain the agent and the patient phrases, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) *tena ratsy ny fanasan-dRaso lamba*
very bad the washing-by Raso clothes

The way in which clothes are washed by Raso is very bad.

2.2 Adapting to European Vocabulary

Given the productive devices in Malagasy for forming verbs and nouns, we can now see how Malagasy survived the onslaught of European contact without having to borrow huge numbers of words designating concepts of European origin. For example, consider the general area of formal education. A few words like *boky* "book" and *sekoly* "school" were in fact borrowed. But most words pertaining to formal instruction are of Malagasy origin. Thus from a root *anatra* meaning "counsel, advice," we form the intransitive verb *mianatra* "to study, learn." And "student," of course, is just the agent noun *mpianatra*. The circumstantial form of the verb is *ianarana* (the final *-tra* part of roots usually drops or is modified in circumstantial forms, as are *-na* and *-ka*). And the circumstantial noun *fianarana* means "studying, learning, or studies." Further, if we form the causative verb from *mianatra*, we obtain *mampianatra* "to cause to study or learn," which is to say "to teach." The agent noun, *mpampianatra* then means, "teacher," and the circumstantial noun from this verb, *fampianarana*, as you might predict, means "instruction." Further, circumstantial nouns are often used to modify other nouns. Thus alongside *sekoly* "school" we can also use *trano fianarana* or *trano fampianarana* meaning "house for learning" and "house for teaching" respectively. This usage of circumstantial nouns is very common in naming the stores and shops introduced by European culture. From the root *varotra* we form *mivarotra* "to sell" and the circumstantial noun *fivarotana* "purpose, place, manner, etc. of selling." Combined with a noun like *trano* "house" we obtain *trano fivarotana*, which naturally means "house for selling" that is, "store." If we desire to specify what type of store, we merely retain the patient phrase of the verb from which the circumstantial noun is formed. Thus "bookstore" would be *trano fivarotam-boky*, "house for selling books."

3 MALAGASY SUBJECTS AND COMPLEX STRUCTURES

3.1 Subjects as Topics

In English, indeed in most languages, the subjects of simple sentences normally identify the main individuals (or objects) which the speaker is talking about—that is, the subject expresses the *topic* of the sentence. And perhaps more importantly, by identifying the topic, the subject phrase allows the hearer to guess how the *relevance* or *importance* of what is going to be said relates to what he already knows. Thus if I begin a sentence in English with "*John . . .*" I assume the hearer knows who I am talking about and has some idea of the relevance of what I will say; this in turn depends on what the hearer knows about John, including what may have been said about him in previous discourse.

Given that subjects occur sentence-finally in Malagasy, we might expect that the relevance function of subjects would not be prominent. Indeed it is often the case that the hearer must wade through a complex predicate phrase before he has an idea of how what is said relates to what he already knows or cares about. For example, in (12) below, several individuals are mentioned before the topic "John":

- (12) *nahita ny vehivavy izay nanasa ny zaza Rajaona*
saw the woman that washed the child John
John saw the woman who washed the child.

Nonetheless, subjects in Malagasy have perhaps a more prominent topic-relevance function than in English. Consider that to determine the relevance of what will be said, the topic phrase must succeed in identifying an individual (or individuals). Thus topic phrases are usually definite, as in proper names such as *John* and *Chicago*; or demonstrative noun phrases, such as *this man*; or noun phrases with a definite article, such as *the man* (which most usually serves to identify a man as the one already talked about in the discourse). On the other hand, indefinite noun phrases like *a man*, *some men*, *two men*, etc. do not identify individuals to the hearer and thus do not permit him to assess the relevance, or importance to him, of what will be said.

In English, however, it is quite possible for subjects to be indefinite, as in (13):

- (13) A woman was washing some clothes in the river.

Such a sentence is not primarily *about* some particular woman, since no such woman is identified. And upon hearing the phrase *a woman*, the hearer of (13) is not (usually) in a position to assess the relevance of what will be said. Thus *a woman* in (13) does not identify the topic of

discussion nor does it serve as a relevance indicator. Yet the phrase *a woman* is clearly, syntactically speaking, the subject of the sentence (e.g. it takes nominative pronouns, controls verb agreement, occurs in initial position, etc.). So subjects in English are not consistently topics or relevance indicators. But in Malagasy they are. Subjects in Malagasy must be definite. Thus (14) is categorically ungrammatical.

- (14) **manasa zaza vehivavy*
wash child woman

A woman is washing children.

How would we express the idea in (14) in Malagasy? The principal way would be to use an existential construction, as in (15).

- (15) *misy vehivavy manasa zaza*
exist woman wash child

A woman is washing children. (Literally "[there] is a woman washing children.")

We note that *misy* is a normal verb taking present, past, and future tenses, having imperative forms ("let there be..."), circumstantial forms, etc. It usually translates the "hard core" notions of existence seen in (16) and (17).

- (16) *misy liona any Afrika*
exist lion there Africa

There are lions in Africa.

- (17) *misy Andriamanitra*
exist God

God exists.

Sentences like (15) in English and Malagasy then lack topics and relevance indicators. And in Malagasy they also lack subjects. We note, for example, that *vehivavy* "woman" in (15) does not have the syntactic properties of subjects in Malagasy. For example, we cannot relativize it. That would yield the ungrammatical (18).

- (18) *(ny) *vehivavy izay misy manasa zaza*
the woman that exist wash child

The woman who there is washing children.

We should further note that if the agent phrase in sentences like (15) is fully indefinite, as *someone* in English, there would most usually be no noun phrase at all following the existence verb!

- (19) *misy manasa zaza*
exist wash child

Someone is washing children.

This indeed is one of the ways of avoiding direct reference to individuals, and as we shall see, avoiding direct reference to individuals is often very important in Malagasy society.

The role of subjects as topics gives us reason to believe that despite its final position, the category of subject is very important in Malagasy syntax. In fact, we have already seen another piece of evidence in support of this. For we can think of 'passive' and 'circumstantial' as ways of converting various types of nonsubjects into subjects. These operations, or as we shall say, transformations, move the appropriate nonsubject to subject position, sentence final; eliminate whatever prepositions the noun phrase may have carried; and put the verb into a characteristic form. But there are no transformations in Malagasy that systematically convert, for example, nonobjects into objects, or noninstrumentals into instrumentals. The only noun phrase into which others can be converted is the subject noun phrase. Further, many other ways of transforming certain sentences into others also apply, in one way or another, to subjects. We now consider examples of several such processes.

3.2 The Reflexive Construction

In English when we want to indicate in a simple sentence that the agent and the patient are the same, we normally put the sentence in an active form and present the patient phrase as a reflexive pronoun, as in "John likes himself" or "Mary killed herself." This process is usually described by saying that when two noun phrases refer to the same thing, the second can be replaced by a pronoun (in the above cases by a reflexive pronoun). But for English we could equally well describe this process by saying, as we did above, that in an active sentence the direct object (or the patient phrase) becomes a reflexive pronoun and the subject phrase remains as is. Since the direct object occurs after the subject, the two descriptions are equivalent for English. But in Malagasy the direct object occurs before the subject, so the two descriptions give different predictions in this case. If the second noun phrase were to become the reflexive pronoun, we would expect to say "likes John himself" for "John likes himself," whereas if the object noun phrase becomes the reflexive pronoun, we would expect to say "likes himself John." And it turns out that the subject-object distinction is more important in Malagasy than the left-right order distinction. That is, it is the object phrase that becomes a reflexive pronoun, not the second noun

phrase that occurs. Thus we must say literally, "Likes himself Rabe" or "Killed herself Rasoa" as illustrated below.

- (20) *tia tena Rabe*
like self Rabe
Rabe likes himself.

- (21) *namono tena Rasoa*
killed self Rasoa
Rasoa killed herself.

(As with other pronouns in Malagasy the reflexive pronoun does not vary with the gender of the noun phrase to which it refers.) So it is that contrary to English and most European languages, Malagasy allows pronouns to precede their 'antecedents' in simple sentences.

3.3 Coordination

Similarly, when in certain closely connected contexts a noun phrase is understood to refer to the same entity more than once, we do not have to repeat it. This is the case, for example, if the topic of our discussion plays the role of subject in two coordinated clauses. In English instead of saying "John came early and John left late," we would usually say "John came early and left late," omitting the second occurrence of the subject "John." But in such a case in Malagasy it is the first occurrence of the subject that is normally omitted. Thus the most natural way to say (22a) below would be as in (22b)—waiting for the identification of the subject and topic "Rabe" until the very end. (Note that when two phrases, as opposed to sentences, are conjoined with "and" the conjunction used is *sy* rather than *ary*. *Ary* can only conjoin full sentences.)

- (22) a. *misotro taoka Rabe ary mihinam-bary Rabe*
drink booze Rabe and eat rice Rabe
Rabe is drinking booze and Rabe is eating rice.

- b. *misotro taoka sy mihinam-bary Rabe*
drink booze and eat rice Rabe
Rabe is drinking booze and eating rice.

Again, it seems funny to the European ear to omit a noun from a fairly simple sentence before we know to what it would refer. However, in this respect, the Malagasy ear listens to a different tune.

3.4 Relative Clauses

Another common way in many languages of the world to form complex structures from simpler ones is by moving parts of a simpler one to other positions and perhaps inserting a few other 'grammatical' words. Consider, for example, a simple sentence such as "The woman

washed the clothes." Suppose we want to talk about that woman, identifying her precisely as the one who washed the clothes. We might refer to her as "The woman *who* washed the clothes." We will refer to such structures as *relative clauses* and the noun that occupies the position of "woman" as the *head* of the relative clause. Notice that in the above example the head functions as the subject of the verb *washed* since it is the woman who is doing the washing. Had we relativized on the object of the verb, the resulting relative clause would have been "The clothes that the woman washed." So in this case the head of the relative clause would be functioning as the object of the verb.

Now, in English we may think of relative clauses as being formed from sentences by taking the noun phrase to be relativized and moving it to the front and perhaps inserting some grammatical words like "who" or "that." If we relativize on a subject, of course the noun phrase to be relativized is already at the front of the clause, so no movement is apparent. But when we relativize on an object, or any nonsubject, the movement to the front is apparent.

When we relativize on a subject phrase in Malagasy we also move that phrase to the front and optionally insert a particle *izay* "that." Compare the simple sentence in (23a) below with the relative clause formed on the subject in (23b).

- (23) a. *nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy*
washed the clothes the woman
The woman washed the clothes.

- b. *ny vehivavy izay nanasa ny lamba*
the woman that washed the clothes
The woman who washed the clothes.

However, if we attempt to relativize on the object, we find that the resulting relative clause is ungrammatical or nonsensical. Moving the object to the front and inserting *izay* would yield (24).

- (24) **ny lamba izay nanasa ny vehivavy*
The clothes that washed the woman.

(24) could only mean "the clothes that washed the woman," which would of course be comical since clothes can't wash people. In other words, in Malagasy the head noun of a relative clause *must* be understood to function as the subject of the verb.

But how then do we talk about "the clothes that the woman washed" in Malagasy? It might seem that we have a real gap in expressive power here. But such is not the case. We simply make the sentence from which we form the relative clause into the passive form,

so that "the clothes" is the subject, and then we can relativize on "the clothes" yielding "the clothes that were washed by the woman." (25a) below illustrates the passive form of (23a) above, and (25b) the relative clause formed on "clothes."

- (25) a. *nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba*
washed-by-the woman the clothes
The clothes were washed by the woman.
- b. *ny lamba izay nosasan'ny vehivavy*
the clothes that washed-by-the woman
The clothes that were washed by the woman.

Similarly in Malagasy it is not possible to relativize on any nonsubject noun phrase. If, for example, we want to relativize on an instrumental, as in "the soap that Rasoa washed clothes with," we must first put the verb in the circumstantial form so that the instrumental noun phrase is the derived subject, and only then may we relativize on it. In this way the thing we are talking about within the relative clause, the topic, is always the subject. Thus from (26a) below, we cannot directly relativize on "the soap," which would yield (26b), a meaningless expression in Malagasy. Rather we must first convert (26a) to the circumstantial form in (26c), where "soap" is the subject, and then relativize it, as in (26d).

- (26) a. *manasa lamba amin'ny savony Rasoa*
wash clothes with the soap Rasoa
Rasoa washes clothes with the soap.
- b. **ny savony izay manasa lamba Rasoa*
The soap that washes clothes Rasoa
- c. *anasan-dRasoa lamba ny savony*
washes-with-by-Rasoa clothes the soap
The soap is used by Rasoa to wash clothes.
- d. *ny savony izay anasan-dRasoa lamba*
the soap that washes-with-by-Rasoa clothes
The soap used by Rasoa to wash clothes.

It turns out then that the system of verb voices—active, passive, and circumstantial—plays a much greater role in the syntax of Malagasy than does the more limited system of active vs. passive forms in English; and further, the role of 'subject' is much greater in Malagasy since only subjects can be relativized.

3.5 Information Questions

Furthermore, what holds of relative clause formation in Malagasy also holds, to a greater or lesser extent, for all processes that form complex structures from simpler ones by moving elements. Consider, for example, questions of the "who? what? when? where?" sort. In both English and Malagasy the principal way of forming such questions puts the question word in the front of the clause, as illustrated in (27) and its English translation.

- (27) *Iza no nanasa ny lamba?*
Who part washed the clothes
Who washed the clothes?

Note that following the question word in Malagasy there is a grammatical particle *no*, which serves to isolate the question word and to emphasize it. Again however, (27) illustrates the case where the subject of the verb has been questioned. If we try to question the object by moving the appropriate question word forward we get the nonsensical (28). The only correct way to ask "What did the woman wash?" is as in (29) in which the question word "what?" functions as the subject of the verb, and the question is literally "What was washed by the woman?"

- (28) **Inona no nanasa ny vehivavy?*
What part washed the woman
What did the woman wash?
- (29) *Inona no nosasan'ny vehivavy*
What part washed-by-the woman
What was washed by the woman?

Once again then, in the simple cases cited, only subjects can be moved, in this case questioned, and once again the voicing system comes into play to make these noun phrases we want to question into subjects. Clearly then if we lost the voicing system in Malagasy, the rest of the syntax would have to change in radical ways. In particular the basic methods of forming questions and relative clauses would have to change. In English on the other hand, the loss of the passive voice would not entail many serious consequences for the grammar, for basically no major syntactic operations in English require the sentence on which they operate to be passive.

3.6 Raising

We conclude this section with consideration of a more complex example of Malagasy syntax that indicates the overwhelming role played by the notion of 'subject' in Malagasy.

Suppose someone claims "John thinks that Mary washed these clothes" and that sometime later we want to refer to those clothes. In English we may easily form the appropriate relative clause *the clothes that John thinks Mary washed*. But in Malagasy such relative clauses would seem impossible to form, since *clothes* is clearly not the subject of the main verb *think*. Further, we cannot use the passive or circumstantial voices to make it into the subject of *think*, since these voices would only apply to noun phrases that occur in the main clause, and *clothes* occurs in an embedded or subordinate clause. Thus *Mary washed the clothes* is itself a sentence that occurs embedded within the larger sentence *John thinks that Mary washed the clothes*. It might appear once more that Malagasy has an expressive gap. But such is not the case, for Malagasy has a very productive means of raising embedded noun phrases into main clauses, whence they can be made into subjects by the voicing system and then relativized (or questioned, or otherwise moved).

We shall illustrate the 'raising' first in English. In sentence (30a) the noun phrase *the woman* occurs within a sentence itself embedded within the entire sentence.

- (30) a. John thinks that the woman washed the clothes
 b. John thinks the woman to have washed the clothes

In (30b) however, the phrase *the woman* is presented as a direct object of the main verb *think*. Thus it occurs immediately after that verb, it takes accusative forms of the pronoun (to give *her* instead of *she* as in *John thinks her to have washed the clothes* as opposed to *John thinks that she washed the clothes*), and it can passivize the subject, as in *the woman was thought to have washed the clothes*. It appears clear then that the embedded noun phrase *the woman* in (30a) has been raised to main clause position in (30b).

This raising process in English, however, is of only limited productivity. Some native speakers of English find sentences like (30b) awkward or pretentious. Their acceptability varies with the choice of main verb.

Thus most speakers would probably not allow *the woman* to be raised from *John said that the woman washed the clothes*, which would yield *John said the woman to have washed the clothes*. Similarly, it would be unacceptable for most speakers to say *John hoped the woman to have washed the clothes* and *John doubted the woman to have washed the clothes*.

But in Malagasy the raising process is fully productive. Basically all verbs of thinking and saying allow an embedded noun phrase to be

raised as an object of the main verb. We illustrate this in (31)³, where (31a) indicates the underlying sentence and (31b) the derived one. The embedded sentence is indicated by brackets.

- (31) a. *mihevitra* [fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy]
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman

Rajaona
Rajaona

Rajaona thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

- b. *mihevitra* ny vehivavy ho nanasa ny lamba
 thinks the woman that washed the clothes

Rajaona
Rajaona

Rajaona thinks the woman to have washed the clothes.

Clearly *ny vehivavy* "the woman" looks and behaves like a direct object of the main verb *mihevitra* "think." Thus it immediately follows that verb, and it takes accusative forms of the pronoun, *azy* as opposed to *izy* (see example (4) for the use of the nominative form *izy* in a simple sentence). And finally of course, since *ny vehivavy* "the woman" is the object of the main verb, it can now passivize to the subject, as in (32).

- (32) *heverin-dRajaona* ho nanasa ny lamba ny
 thought-by-Rajaona that washed the clothes the
vehivavy
 woman

The woman was thought by John to have washed the clothes.

And now, since "the woman" is the subject of the sentence, it can be relativized, as in (33).

³The structure in (31a) indicates the source for the raising process. As it stands, however, it is not acceptable, since most speakers of Malagasy will not accept a full sentence to occur between the main verb and its subject. Thus if no noun phrase is raised from the embedded sentence, the main clause must be removed to the right of the subject phrase yielding the unusual Verb + Subject + Object order (considering the embedded sentence to be the object of the verb "think") illustrated in (a) below.

(a) *mihevitra* *Rajaona* fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy
 thinks Rajaona that washed the clothes the woman
 John thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

- (33) *ny vehivavy izay heverin-dRajaona ho nanasa*
 the woman that thought-by-Rajaona that washed
ny lamba
 the clothes

The woman who John thought washed the clothes.

Notice in passing that when we raise a noun phrase from an embedded sentence, the subordinator *fa* changes to *ho* but otherwise the embedded sentence remains unchanged.⁴

Notice finally that the noun phrase we have raised to main clause object in Malagasy is originally the subject of the embedded verb. And in fact only subjects of embedded verbs may be raised. However, our original question was how to say *the clothes that John thought the woman washed*. Now looking at sentence (34) below, it is clear that *ny lamba* "the clothes" is not the subject of the embedded verb but rather the object.

- (34) *mihevitra [fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy]*
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman
Rajaona
Rajaona

Rajaona thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

At this point, the reader should be able, by successive application of the syntactic processes discussed so far, to form a Malagasy relative clause that translates *the clothes that John thought that the woman washed*. We shall present the answer immediately below, however, to make the conclusion of this last section clear.

To relativize on *ny lamba* "the clothes" in (34) above, we must reorganize the syntax of the sentence so that *ny lamba* is the main clause subject. Now, since *ny lamba* occurs embedded, we might hope to raise it to main clause object position and then passivize it to subject. But *ny lamba* cannot be directly raised because only subjects of embedded verbs can be so raised, and *ny lamba* is the object, not the subject of the embedded verb *nanasa* "washed." (Note that if we did directly raise *ny lamba* from (34), we would obtain a sentence that would be translated as *John thinks the clothes to have washed the woman*. That is, "the clothes" would be necessarily understood as the subject of "wash," and hence it would be the woman who got washed by the clothes!) However, we can easily make *ny lamba* into the subject of

⁴In English on the other hand, the identity of the embedded sentence is more severely affected. The tense marking on the verb is lost, and the verb takes an infinitival form ("to have washed the clothes" as opposed to "washed the clothes").

the embedded sentence by passivizing the embedded verb *nanasa* "washed." Then *ny lamba* can be raised to become the object of the main verb *mihevitra* "thinks," then it can be passivized to main clause subject, and finally it can be relativized, yielding (35).⁵

- (35) *ny lamba izay heverin-dRajaona ho*
 the clothes that thought-by-Rajaona that
nosasan'ny vehivavy
 washed-by the woman

The clothes that were thought by John to have been washed by the woman (or more colloquially, "The clothes that John thought that the woman washed").

Clearly then the notion of 'subject' is not an unimportant one in Malagasy syntax, despite its occurrence in sentence final position. Rather, much of the major syntax of Malagasy is organized around ways to make different noun phrases into subjects. Thus we can now understand why the Malagasy voicing system and the raising process are much more developed and productive than the corresponding systems in English: they have a much greater functional role, since they make noun phrases accessible to major syntactic processes like relativization and question formation, and generally serve to place topics in subject position.

⁵We begin with sentence (a) below:

- (a) *mihevitra [fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy] Rajaona*
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman Rajaona
 John thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

Then we passivize the embedded verb:

- (b) *mihevitra [fa nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba] Rajaona*
 thinks that washed-by-the woman the clothes Rajaona
 John thinks that the clothes were washed by the woman.

Then we raise the subject of the embedded verb to become the object of the main verb:

- (c) *mihevitra ny lamba ho nosasan'ny vehivavy Rajaona*
 thinks the clothes that washed-by-the woman Rajaona
 John thinks the clothes to have been washed by the woman.

Then we passivize the main verb, making *ny lamba* "the clothes" the main clause subject:

- (d) *heverin-dRajaona ho nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba*
 thought-by-Rajaona that washed-by-the woman the clothes

The clothes were thought by John to have been washed by the woman.

Now we may relativize on *ny lamba*:

- (e) *ny lamba izay heverin-dRajaona ho nosasan'ny vehivavy*
 the clothes that thought-by-Rajaona that washed-by-the woman

The clothes that were thought by John to have been washed by the woman.

4 CONDITIONS ON THE USE OF SPEECH

The European learner of Malagasy who had perfected his knowledge of the sound system of the language and the various ways of forming words, phrases, and sentences would, as we indicated at the beginning of our discussion, still find himself unable to perform successfully most social acts requiring the use of speech in the type of peasant community in which we lived.

He would frequently draw many incorrect inferences from what people said and equally frequently fail to draw correct inferences. In addition he would frequently be misunderstood and find that his attempts at communication prompted reactions quite different from those he intended.

The general reason for such unsuccessful communication is that the norms of social interaction in Madagascar are different in many respects from those of European society. This point is easy to acknowledge in the abstract but difficult to understand in practice. Hence, in this section we will describe the differences in communication norms in terms of our personal experiences, which led us to adapt our speech habits to those of the Malagasy context.

To explain the types of misunderstandings that can occur, we shall first discuss several general conditions on the use of speech in a Malagasy peasant community and then illustrate how these conditions affect the interpretation of most socially normal everyday discourse.

4.1 The Information Structure of a Malagasy Peasant Community

The area in which we lived consists of many small villages scattered across a hilly, formerly volcanic area. Rice, the staple crop, is grown in the lower areas near the springs and small creeks; the villages themselves are located on the higher ground. An unpaved road, passable by car though sometimes cut off during the rainy season, links these villages to a somewhat larger road leading to the closest town (pop: 3,000-4,000).

In such communities new information, that is, information not known to the population at large, is properly described as a *scarce good*. Access to news from outside the community is difficult. Very few people are literate, and practically no one has a radio. Newspapers, magazines, and portable radios can be obtained in towns but must be paid for in cash—a commodity that is very limited in a subsistence or near-subsistence economy. Consequently information from outside the community is hard to obtain and must pass from person to person, community to community, by word of mouth. (Compare this situation with the deluge of new information that a middle-class American is subjected to everyday via newspapers, radio, and television.)

Furthermore, new information originating from within the com-

munity is also rare. Within a given village, everybody knows everybody else, and everybody knows most people in the closely neighboring villages. A typical household spends most of its day working in the fields and hence is in public view of everybody else. And as one's rice plot is normally within view of one's house, the people you live with are also the people you work with. Relatively few events occur on a day-to-day basis that are not publicly observable (although there are, of course, family squabbles). The most important unpredictable events to an agricultural people concern the weather, something again that is immediate public knowledge. In addition, within such communities there is very little specialization of labor. It is unusual for your neighbor to have a skill or occupation that you are not at least reasonably able in yourself, so it is unlikely that something would happen to him that wouldn't happen to you.

The regularity of day-to-day life is even more apparent on a larger time scale. The yearly cycle of events is largely determined by the rice planting, cultivating, and harvesting cycle. After the harvest there are about two months in which the ceremony season takes place, and during that time one does have the occasion to meet more people from outlying villages. However, even one's life cycle is, in general, predictable. A child is gradually initiated into the work cycle and when strong enough, assumes his or her full share. The child can expect to pursue that same work until he dies and can expect to live in the same locality where he was born, or at most move once to a newer village as land becomes scarce in his home village.

Consequently, any sort of new information is at a premium; and, someone who has, for example, been to market and found out something not generally known will find himself the center of interest until the information is divulged. So, in order to remain the center of attention, one imparts new information only piece by piece. As we shall see, eliciting what might appear to an outsider to be fairly trivial information is a lengthy and difficult process.

4.2 Collective vs. Individual Action

A second condition of Malagasy peasant life that governs much interpersonal behavior including speech behavior is the norm of collective responsibility for action. It would be *exceedingly* unusual in the communities we are discussing for an individual, as such, to initiate an important action and assume responsibility for it. There are two major 'units of responsibility' within a village: families, and the village "elders" (*ray-aman-dreny*, literally, "father-and-mother"). The concepts of family and of *ray-aman-dreny* are not independent and are central to understanding norms of personal action in Malagasy life.

A family is composed of the descendents of a given ancestor plus



those brought into the line of descent by marriage. Within a village, members of a given household belong to the same family. A normal household consists of parents plus their children, often ten to twelve in number. Grandparents usually live in separate houses and if they have no small children of their own will take to live with them the first born of one of their children. Within a village, members of the same family work their rice land in common, though each household may have possession of particular plots. The whole family, men, women, and children, participates in the cultivation of the rice plots. Certain work is usually done by women, such as the transplanting of the seedlings from the seed beds to the main beds; other work is done by men, such as preparing the main beds for planting; while other work is done in common, such as harvesting the main beds. The whole family, then, and no one single individual, is responsible for the rice crop.



FIGURE 3.3 *Tombs, Individual Oratory, and Collective Responsibility.* On the left page, an orator delivering a *kabary* from the top of a tomb. Above, a work party building a tomb.

As a given person may have married and separated more than once, more or less formally, individuals may have several possibilities for deciding from which principal ancestor they are descended. But in practice, family membership at any given moment is usually clear, since it imposes severe obligations in terms of mutual help in rice cultivation and upkeep of the family tomb. The family you belong to is determined by the tomb in which you will be buried. The tombs are massive stone vaults, partly above ground and partly below, containing various stone beds on which cadavers are laid out in expensive raw silk cloths during special ceremonies. These cloths and the general upkeep of a tomb are much more expensive than, for example, upkeep on one's house. (A house is normally made of sun-dried bricks with rice stalk roofs and is more easily built and destroyed than a family tomb.)

Psychologically the ancestors in one's tomb are very much a part of one's family. Every few years a family will have a major ceremony, called *famadihana*, "the turning (of the bones)." (*Famadihana* is the circumstantial noun from *mamadika*, "to turn.") At the *famadihana* the tombs are opened, the ancestors are brought out and rewrapped in new cloths. Cadavers that are reduced to a pile of bones are put in the collective ancestor cloth located in the rear of the tomb, the most sacred

place within a tomb. While the ancestors are out of the tomb, much dancing and singing goes on. People may talk to their ancestors, inform them of recent happenings, perhaps confess for misdeeds they have done, and even give them a little rum. When the ancestors are returned to the tomb, new cadavers that were buried temporarily in shallow graves near the tomb (opening a tomb requires government permission and may only take place every few years) will also be taken into the tomb. This ceremony usually lasts a night and a day, requires marshaling together the entire extended family, and is in general an expensive and festive affair.

One of the major fears of a Malagasy is to die away from his family tomb and so not be able to be buried there. For example, when our villagers learned that men had been sent to the moon, the first question they expressed was "Where would they be buried if they died there?" The greatest shame a Malagasy can know is to be deprived of the right to be buried in the family tomb. This would mean that he would not be a member of the family and not be an ancestor. Even Malagasy who have left the country to work in a city feel a strong moral obligation to attend a family *famadihana* and are always returned to the family tomb for their burial.

The other major line of responsibility within a village is constituted by the *ray-aman-dreny*. People are *ray-aman-dreny* to the extent that they have offspring and hence will be ancestors. Any important *ray-aman-dreny* belongs to a family and has children and grandchildren. To be a couple without children is shameful. Marriages that do not produce children within the first year are under strong family pressure to dissolve. Normally upon marriage a woman moves to the village of her husband (though exceptions to this in our area were not uncommon). If she has children, she becomes part of the husband's family and is buried in his tomb. But if she has no children and withstands the pressure to leave her husband and return to her village, she will still not be buried in the tomb of the husband's family but rather in the tomb of her parents—the ultimate proof that she has not attained *ray-aman-dreny* status.

Members of a family (on the same side of the *ray-aman-dreny* line) are almost fully egalitarian. They share the same living quarters, working conditions, and possessions. It would be quite normal, for example, for a city cousin to return for a visit wearing European-style clothes (rather than the traditional togalike *lamba*). Upon arrival he might don a relative's traditional garb and shortly thereafter you would see his brothers and sisters wearing various pieces of his European clothing around the village.

Most actions then are taken by families or the *ray-aman-dreny* and not by individuals. This is true not only for the regular major activities like rice cultivation, but also for any sudden, unpredictable activity of any importance. For example, if a *ray-aman-dreny* dies suddenly, his

family in his village and in the closely neighboring villages has the responsibility for the funeral. (This is the burial in the temporary grave near the family tomb and is not a major ceremony.) However, the other *ray-aman-dreny* of the deceased's village and their families will share in the preparations as well. No one individual assumes responsibility for effecting the entire undertaking. Women from many different households, whether of the deceased's family or not, will help in cooking the food for those who attend and will help out in other ways. A dozen men might easily contribute their effort to construct a coffin for the deceased. We once saw six different men participate in turn and sometimes jointly in the sawing of a *single* board for a coffin! Should it turn out upon the transferral of the body to the family tomb a year or two later that the coffin was not well constructed, no one individual would be to blame.

Under these conditions, then, very little is done to draw attention to any one person's particular abilities. For example children who might be exceptionally good at some task, for instance rice pounding, are *never* complimented for their abilities. They are normally described as *tsy mahay* "not able."

It is interesting to consider in this light, the situations that do force an individual to stand out from the rest. Few such situations arise in the natural Malagasy context, but one major one is the speech making that accompanies the opening of the family tomb at a *famadihana* or the formal request for a girl in marriage by the *ray-aman-dreny* of the boy's family. (These requests have the form of a debate or speech contest in which the boy's family loses, pays the brideprice, and leaves with the girl.)

The formal speeches on such occasions are called *kabary* and those who perform them *mpikabary* (from the verb *mikabary*). Being a *mpikabary* is a highly valued skill and requires a thorough knowledge of traditional lore, proverbs, and the structure of ceremonies and also requires exceptional ability to turn a good phrase. Within any community certain people are known to be good *mpikabary*. But giving a *kabary* and responding to your opponent (in the case of a marriage *kabary*) is an action that singles out the *mpikabary* as having special, personal abilities. And inwardly, of course, a good *mpikabary* is proud of his abilities and accomplishments. But outwardly the *mpikabary* is in the very awkward position of having to distinguish himself from his equals. So, in fact, such events are structured in such a way as to minimize his individuality. Thus the *mpikabary* will stand in a group with the other *ray-aman-dreny* of the family. His speeches will inevitably begin with a long and artful apology for his lack of ability. He will also stress that the words he uses are not his own and that he is merely the carrier of the words from the family and the ancestors. It is this last point, that he merely carries the words of others, that absolves him of

investigate the plots in question and found the *ray-aman-dreny* patching up parts of some dikes that had been damaged. Some of the plots did have rice that was bent over, but the plots were mostly intact. So there was no tragedy, just a small loss at worst. However, it would be incorrect to infer that the Malagasy were inaccurate observers of the reported loss. Rather, since something bad had occurred, they portrayed it at its worst, lest in hoping for something better they be deceived and therefore shamed. Probably the single most inconceivable act for Malagasy peasants would be to brag, before the harvest, about what a great crop they were anticipating.

Another type of action that would bring shame to all participants would be to affront or confront someone directly. Any action that would put someone "on the spot," and so draw attention to an individual (especially oneself) would fall under this category. Thus in day-to-day interactions, individuals are very rarely held explicitly accountable for their actions. Suppose two people more or less agree to meet somewhere and go to market together (note that by the norm of noncommittalism it is unlikely that there would have ever been a fully explicit commitment to meet at a certain place at a certain time). Then suppose one of them doesn't show up. Although he might at a later time offer some explanation for his behavior, it is most unlikely that he would be called upon to do so. Or if a local pastor (whose pay is usually quite low) is found to have been dipping into the collection plate, he might find that under pressure from the *ray-aman-dreny* of the locality, higher church officials have decided to reassign him to another locality. However, it is most unlikely that he would actually be accused of stealing or would be forced to return the money.

Other types of sanctions are available against the transgressor of a norm or law. His family may simply avoid cooperating with him, and the norm of nonconfrontation prevents him from holding them accountable for lack of cooperation. At another time he may find himself the object of malicious, and very possibly totally untrue, gossip.

Overall the norm of nonconfrontation is certainly understandable to the European mind. What is peculiarly Malagasy is the array of actions that are counted as affronting. In rural Malagasy society any action that forces an individual to acknowledge individual responsibility for something or to commit himself explicitly to a future course of events is counted as a confrontation.

We should mention further that the norm of nonconfrontation does not apply equally to both sexes. Men, especially *ray-aman-dreny*, are expected to adhere to this norm much more thoroughly than women. Thus if a child misbehaves, its mother, or another woman of the village, can easily scold the child and hold it accountable for its actions. A man however, would more usually not do this, even if it meant delaying punishment for a considerable period, say until the mother returned

from market. Once, for example, when the man who owned the house we lived in returned to the village to inspect some of his rice land he found that the white mud coating over the bricks on the house had been damaged by the village children who were using the wall to kick a ball against. He remained in the village for two days and occasionally suggested to the parents of the children that something ought to be done about it. But the suggestion was simply overlooked. On the third day he left and returned with his wife who vociferously lit into the first man (in fact, a *ray-aman-dreny*) she met upon entering the village.

As a general rule women do most of the buying and selling in markets (though men do certain heavy tasks like butchering and selling meat). Buying and selling in these communities normally involves bargaining, with one party refusing to pay an initial price, and the other party refusing to sell too cheap. Bargaining involves lots of small confrontations and definite decisions, and women, less subject to the norm of nonconfrontation, are the more natural buyers and sellers.

5 BEHAVIORAL NORMS AND SPEECH USAGE

The behavioral norms we have discussed have serious consequences for speech behavior. We mentioned previously that a European who could merely produce and understand sentences in Malagasy would very frequently misunderstand the intent of someone's speech and be frequently misunderstood himself. We shall consider two types of speech situations where a European speaking Malagasy would fail to make correct inferences.

5.1 The Everyday Exchange of Information

Most everyday conversations involve the exchange of information in one way or another. In middle-class Western society certain norms regarding such exchanges enable us to infer from what was said much more information than was made verbally explicit. In particular, we assume that our conversational partner will provide the information relevant to our needs if he has it, unless there are specific mitigating circumstances. Such circumstances are admittedly quite diverse, some may be quite general and others specific to the particular speech situation. For example, if we're talking with a lawyer about a client, a psychiatrist about a patient, or a priest about someone he confesses, we may expect that certain information will not be given freely. Or if the information we require of someone is particularly personal, he might not want to divulge it. Another possibility is that our partner might want to tease us, deceive us, or play some sort of joke on us. All of these factors limit access to information in Western society, but they are understood

the individual responsibility for his actions. Consider, for example, the following early lines from one *kabary* we recorded.

—Manao azafady aho, fa tsy tompon'ity... tsy tompon-dalana fa mpanohy, tsy tompon-dia fa mpanaraka... tsy tompon-teny fa mpindrana.

—I excuse myself, for (I) am not a master of this... not an originator of paths, but a continuer, not an originator of journeys but a follower... not an originator of words but a *borrower*.

Other instances in which an individual is singled out from the group frequently occur in contact situations with Europeans. For example, one of our best informants was a young man from a neighboring village who made a four-hour trek to the town school every day. We thought to compensate him by providing him with a bicycle. But we quickly realized that this would do him a great disservice because it would be an object for him alone, and it could not easily be shared since most of the time he would be using it himself. This would have made him the object of jealousy, a dangerous emotion in an egalitarian community. In general it is not uncommon for Malagasy who work for Europeans to refuse gifts, despite an obvious need, simply to avoid the troubles that would ensue from their having an object that would distinguish them from their equals.

Perhaps a more common conflict of this sort, and one frequently misunderstood by Europeans, takes place in the context of the European-style school system in which the Malagasy participate (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the remoteness of the village from the school). It frequently happens, for example, that pupils copy each other's homework. The European teacher interprets this as "cheating." But the Malagasy pupil understands it quite differently. He has simply generalized his village ethic to the classroom. The teacher is a *ray-aman-dreny* and the pupils are all equals as non-*ray-aman-dreny*. If one pupil has finished an assignment, it would be as unnatural not to share it with others as it would be not to share any other temporary possession in the village, such as your city cousin's clothing.

4.3 Noncommittalism, Avoidance of Affront, and the Concept of *Henatra*

Another very important concept in understanding Malagasy social behavior is that of *henatra*, a root noun that translates as "shame." The predicate adjective formed from it is *menatra*, better translated as "be shamed" rather than merely "be ashamed," and the commonly heard causative form is *mahamenatra* "to cause shame." (The causative prefix before adjectives is *maha-* rather than *mamp-*, which is used before

verbs.) One of the most commonly heard injunctions against a particular behavior in a Malagasy community is *mahamenatra izany* "That causes shame" or "That is shameful."

We shall consider here two types of activity that Malagasy easily recognize as causing shame. The first of these is overt committal to some future good. Actually this almost never happens. To commit oneself to a future good, overtly, and then have the future course of events turn out otherwise would cause excruciating shame. For example, a village Malagasy does not normally prepare for the birth of a child. Since it is common for children to die during birth, a prospective mother who bought baby clothes in anticipation of the birth runs the risk of bringing great *henatra* to all concerned. We once bought some baby clothes for the anticipated birth of a child of a friend of ours but had at least the sense not to give them to her beforehand. Unfortunately the baby died at birth, and our sadness was indeed heavily mixed with *henatra*.

The principle of noncommittalism to future goods extends as well to many European-introduced activities. One would, for example, never pay for work in advance. If the contractor fled before completing the work, one would be caught red-handed and red-faced. A personal example: on first arriving in Madagascar we set up a bank account and deposited some checks we had. On leaving the bank we realized that we had no receipt for our deposit and had a moment of panic. Suppose they "lost" the money. Had we deposited cash, we would have received a receipt. But since we deposited checks, the Malagasy bank had to wait until they cleared before they could be sure they actually had the money. Giving us a receipt would have, psychologically at least, committed them to the existence of our dollars before they had them.

The mentality of 'noncommittalism to future goods' leads to the tendency to leap to the worst possible conclusion—for this protects one from being deceived through hoping that any good might be forthcoming. Once, for example, while talking with some neighbors outside their house, we were startled by a sudden crash from the area where the rabbits were kept. Before we had recovered from the loud noise, the lady of the house blurted out, "The rabbits are all dead!" And indeed the correct interpretation of the noise turned out to be that a side of the rabbit pen had fallen over. But that the crash would kill any of the rabbits was unlikely and that it would kill all of them was absurd. Still, just to be on the safe side, our neighbor assumed the worst possible outcome.

Another example: on returning to the village one evening after a heavier than usual afternoon rain we were informed that a certain *ray-aman-dreny*'s dikes had collapsed and that his rice crop was *entirely ruined*. That night we pondered the catastrophe and wondered if there was some way we could help out. The next morning we went to

relative to the expectation that information will ordinarily be given freely. Thus if we perceive that someone is avoiding our questions or being intentionally vague, we then assume that either he doesn't have the information we need or that one or more of the special circumstances applies.

In Malagasy society, on the other hand, the basic norm concerning free exchange of information simply does not apply, so inferences Westerners would make concerning the absence of information in special circumstances are generally incorrect. Imagine the following situation in Western society: A neighbor of yours sees you and your son walking up the street by your house and asks "Hey, Ed. Where're ya goin' so early?" And you answer, "Hi, just up to the hardware store. Gotta get some nails. We're building a treehouse."

It is safe to say that such an exchange would almost never occur among native rural Malagasy. Although it might be hard for the reader to appreciate, it would be totally bizarre for a Malagasy to volunteer all that information about the hardware store, the nails, building a treehouse, etc. A far more typical dialogue, when meeting a friend on a road or a path would be:

- | | |
|--|---|
| -Manao akory rangahy? | -How is it going, friend? |
| -Tsara ihany tompoko, ka manao ahaona ny vady-aman-janaka? | -Just fine sir, and how is the family? |
| -Tsara ihany fa misaotra, ka ho aiza moa? | -Just fine, thanks. Where are you headed? |
| -Atsy avaraparatra atsy tompoko. Ka ianareo moa, ho aiza? | -Just there a little to the North there. And where are you going? |
| -Izahay koa, dia mitsangan-tsangana ihany. | -We also, we're just out for a little walk. |
| -Eny ary, ka mandra-pihaona aloha. | -OK then, so long (lit.: until meeting). |
| -Eny, tain'Andriamanitra e. | -OK, may care be taken by God. |

In the Malagasy dialogue, no real information was given. Even the fact that one person was going to the North contains nothing that is not obvious from context, for Malagasay always reckon position by the cardinal points (North, South, East, and West); and directions of roads, positioning of villages, etc. are known to a local Malagasy with the same ease as right and left are known to a Westerner. Notice also that the word for North is actually *avaratra*. The form *avaraparatra* is a reduplication.

plicated form. Reduplication, especially of verbs and adjectives, is very common in Malagasy and has the effect of attenuating in appropriate ways the meaning of the unreduplicated form. Thus to have answered *atsy avaratra atsy*, without reduplication, would have been slightly more specific. The reduplicated form of 'North' indicates that the person is going perhaps in a somewhat less northward direction than does the unreduplicated form. Notice as well that the verb *mitsangana* "to stroll" is also reduplicated in the dialogue as *mitsangantsangana* and means "to walk around a little." Otherwise the dialogue's greetings and closing are largely ritualized formulas. Performance of these greetings and closings is important in acknowledging your social relations. Different greetings are appropriate for different social classes of people. Failure to greet someone or to use the right greeting would indicate a break in social relations. But these social relations are always known to members of a community, so using the appropriate terms does not, once again, communicate new information, it just reaffirms known status relations.

But note that in the situation depicted above, while the Malagasy does not expect an informative answer to the question "Where are you going?" he would love to have one. For this would give him some new information that he could then pass on, and as we indicated in section 4.1, possession of new information is possession of a scarce good allowing the possessor to command the attention of others. Of course, when we first established ourselves in the community we always gave informative answers to such questions, much to the enormous delight and advantage of those with whom we spoke.

Once, for example, as one of the authors (Edward) was leaving the village by car, having picked up a number of covillagers, a lady from the next village asked him how his wife was. He responded that she was just a little under the weather. This elicited the surprise exclamation *Kai!* (since it was an informative answer), which he misinterpreted as the weak conjunction *ka...* which would have asked for a continuation of the discourse (like saying "and..." expectantly, with a rising intonation). So he continued by supplying more information, "She'll go to the spring and wash out some clothes later." This, of course, elicited an even stronger *Kai!* reaction, which again misinterpreted, prompted still further information, and so on. Finally it was necessary to cease giving further information, as Edward couldn't think of anything further to say. And much later, reflecting on this interchange, we realized that it must have had an almost surrealistic quality for the Malagasy who were listening—each surprise reaction eliciting even more intensely the very act that prompted the surprise reaction in the first place. It would be a bit as though scratching a little itch behind your ear served to intensify the itch, thus prompting more scratching, then more itching, and so on. What began as a trivial piece of everyday conversation turned into a grotesque parody.

Let us consider some other typical situations in which the free information norm of Western society is not followed, leading to incorrect inferences on the part of the European in a Malagasy context.

A European enters a village where he is well known and asks some women in the courtyard for one of his friends. (If the European were not known, it is unlikely he would find anyone to talk with for no one would accept the responsibility for having introduced an unknown power into the village life. Maybe the man is a tax collector. Or maybe he has come to steal some hearts—it is widely believed that white men need blood and kill little children to take their hearts.) The women respond *Asa* (a single particle meaning “I don’t know”). Then after some discussion the wife of the friend appears on the scene and says that the friend isn’t there. You say you wonder when he’ll return, to which she responds, “Well, if you don’t come after dinner you won’t catch him.”

This use of a double negative would be interpreted as uncooperative in Western society. One might think the wife perhaps is being coy, but certainly is not giving as much information as she could. But, in fact, the wife is not being coy or uncooperative. She is merely adhering to the norm of noncommittalism. The more natural response here for a European would be, “He’ll be here after dinner” or at least, depending on the knowledge of the speaker, “I expect him here after dinner.” But such claims of course, commit the speaker to a future course of action. The weaker claim, “If you don’t come after dinner, you won’t catch him” does not commit the speaker to the claim that if you do come after dinner you will catch him. It merely rules out one case where your action of coming would be in vain and leaves the rest open. If you show up after dinner and he isn’t there, you have no grounds for feeling that you had been given incorrect information. The wife can say in good conscience “He still hasn’t returned.”

A family has been preparing for the marriage of their daughter for the past six months—negotiating with the boy’s family, securing commitments for work and money from his extended family, registering the marriage in the local town government, making provisions for the ceremony, etc. It seems generally agreed that the marriage will probably take place on Thursday. On Tuesday you stop to inquire of the head of the family when the wedding will take place since you are to be one of the guests of honor and don’t want to plan anything that would conflict with the wedding. His response is merely “Oh, pretty soon now.” If you press him on the point by asking “Will it be on Thursday?”—which would be really gauche of you as this violates the nonconfrontation norm—he would likely respond with something like “Ah, Thursday, that would be a good day, we’ll see, we’ll see.”

Again the Malagasy is not being uncooperative here. He is behaving in a natural way, and it would be most unnatural to commit himself to a

particular date in advance. Imagine the shame if, at the last minute, something did happen.

On returning to your village late one night, one of the *ray-aman-dreny* appears at your door. (It is most unusual to visit after dark, so you know something is up.) And you ask him, “What’s new?” (*Inona no vaovao?*) to which he responds *Tsy misy* “Nothing” (lit.: “Not exist”). Then after some inconsequential discussion, it emerges that your neighbor who was expecting has had an unsuccessful labor, the child died, and the woman is in the town hospital. (For a country Malagasy, hospitals are generally regarded as places where you go to die, for they only take people to a hospital as a last resort.)

However, the response “Nothing” to your original question was the only reasonable answer for the Malagasy to give. To come out directly with new, and unpleasant, information would violate convention and put the giver on the spot.

You are taking some friends by car to a distant village. You come to a fork in the road and ask whether or not you go left there. The response is *Eny tompoko* “Yes, sir.” As you start to bear left you hear a mildly excited cry *Eo avaratra eo, angamba* “There to the north perhaps.” So you bear right.

Why did the Malagasy originally answer “yes” when asked about turning left? Because he doesn’t have available, at least without reflection, the concepts of left and right. All directions are given in terms of the cardinal points. Even within a house if I want to ask you for something within easy reach of your left hand, I will still indicate the object as “the tobacco there to the East.” But given that the Malagasy did not comprehend the term left, why did he still agree? Because agreement indicated social solidarity with the speaker. Disagreement would have been a confrontation and saying simply that he hadn’t understood might have implied that you hadn’t spoken appropriately. Normally when people perceive that there is a lack of understanding, they continue talking on the same topic until there is at least minimal communication. What was very awkward in the above situation was that a decision had to be reached quickly. There simply was no time to beat around the bush until the sentiments of your partner were clear.

Note as well that giving directions in terms of cardinal points rather than left and right serves to keep the speaker away from the center of attention. In general to reference objects and (as we shall see) people through oneself would draw attention to oneself, single oneself out from others, and would not then be a normal Malagasy behavior pattern.

Lastly then let us consider the ways human beings are referenced in everyday discourse.

"be washed (by you) the clothes." The verb is passive in form, so attention is focused on the clothes and not the agent of the action (who is, of course, the addressee). Similarly if we want to say "Wash the clothes with this soap," it would be natural to form an imperative from the circumstantial form of the verb, making the instrument, the soap, the superficial subject. Thus *Anasao (-nao) ny lamba ity savony ity* "be washed by you the clothes this soap," or in more natural English "This soap is to be used by you to wash the clothes." Malagasy is in fact one of the relatively few languages in the world that has a well-developed system for forming nonactive imperatives. In English, for example, we simply could not say "be washed (by you) these clothes." The closest we get is "Let the clothes be washed (by you)," a construction archaic and elevated in tone that is not used freely.

Requests as well are often an occasion of considerable frustration on the part of the European in a Malagasy context. Needless to say by now, they are not given directly, for this would put the requestee on the spot and risk an affront to the requester if the request is denied. A normal request, even a fairly urgent one, usually takes place in stages. The requester approaches the requestee and engages him in conversation. Then he brings up the topic his request concerns but does not overtly make the request. The requestee is then free to ignore the topic and move to something else if he would prefer to not satisfy the request. He never has to confront the requester with a denial; he need not recognize the speech act as a request at all. Of course, the requester may persist and continually reintroduce a topic that concerns his needs, but if he is repeatedly ignored, he can still leave without feeling rejected, and hence shamed.

Once, for example, a group of boys, all known to us, came for an impromptu visit. We talked for perhaps twenty minutes, and finally the topic of a cut foot was brought up. Eventually one of the boys in the back of the group came forward and exhibited a severely bleeding foot. (Cut feet are common in this formerly volcanic area.) In this case not only was delaying the request normal but so was the arrival in the group. It would have been much more self-centered to arrive alone.

In fact, it is quite usual for a request to be made by someone other than the one who desires the service or object. For example, in the situation above, it was not the injured boy who directed our attention to the bleeding foot. It was his peer group that performed this act on his behalf. Such a procedure is so commonplace that even very young children are able to engage in this kind of interaction. Four-year-olds, for example, would frequently ask for a sweet for their younger siblings (and we were obliged, of course, to offer something to the older sibling as well).

Requests then are indirect in two ways: They are not made explicitly, and they are often made by a third party on someone else's behalf.

Recall in this connection the *mpikabary* in the formal speech situations who speaks for, or on behalf of, the entire family, including the ancestors. It is important to realize here that our characterization of the Malagasy request as indirect is ethnocentric on our part. What that means is indirect relative to our norms. But for the Malagasy, performing an 'indirect' request is simply to request: To force the behavior to be direct would make it into a social act with very different consequences. The 'indirectness' of Malagasy requests follows from the more general and pervasive norms of group, not individual, responsibility and nonconfrontation.

Thus, even in stress situations in which it is vital to have an answer to a request, it would not normally be possible to force a fully direct request. For example, towards the end of our stay in Madagascar a young man who we knew from the mission school in town but who lived in a village we did not know, arrived at our house with a very large sack of potatoes. It was rather obviously a gift for us, and one beyond the means of an ordinary household to offer. So we knew the boy must have come as a representative of a larger group, perhaps his entire village. And indeed, after having some tea together and chitchatting for perhaps a half an hour he began to approach the purpose of his visit, which was in essence that his village would consider it an honor for us to pay them a visit. And he was obviously commissioned to make the request since he was the only one from the village who knew us. He was further acutely embarrassed at being the sole representative to act on his village's behalf. We, however, had no desire to visit any new villages at that point in our stay so we continually skirted the topic of the visit in good Malagasy fashion. Had this been simply a casual request the hour's conversation with no committal on our part would have sufficed to discourage any further discussion of the matter. However, the boy was on the spot, obviously having to return to the village without his important gift and needing something to tell them in exchange. Finally, exasperated after an entire morning's conversation, he walked determinedly to our window and said, "There's the path (to the village) sir, there's the path." This was as close as he could bring himself to making a direct request. But we, of course, were still free to acknowledge that we indeed saw the path and knew where it went without having to acknowledge his request that we actually visit the village.

In general, request behavior in Madagascar is often misinterpreted by Europeans. A European's request often seems like a confrontation to the Malagasy and this engenders their hostility and lack of cooperation. And the Malagasy's request to the European often appears 'devious', perhaps even dishonest. Yet the Malagasy behavior here might be better termed considerate. Not only is asking a favor done indirectly, but so also is bestowing a favor. Thus a Malagasy may return a kindness by bringing a small gift of some sort. Offering a chicken, for example, is a

A teenage boy from a few houses away pays you an informal visit. After a little discussion he mentions that "Bosy's mother is a little sick". Further discussion yields that he would like to take her some medicine, which you provide and he leaves.

But you are puzzled, since you had thought that he and Bosy were siblings. But had they been he surely would have referred to Bosy's mother as "my mother" or perhaps *Ravelo* (her name). So you infer that perhaps he and Bosy are not really blood siblings, perhaps she is some neighbor's daughter who is only living with the other family.

Your inference, however, would be incorrect. The woman in question was in fact the boy's mother. He didn't refer to her as *his* mother, though, as that would be to reference someone through himself, thus in a small way making himself the center of attention. Neither did he refer to her by her proper name, for that would be too direct a way to identify her and would draw attention to her. Rather he chose, quite naturally in the Malagasy context, to specify her identity through a third party. And even the third party is not, as might appear, unequivocally identified, for *Bosy* is a very common, almost generic, name used to refer to young girls. That is, even if a young girl's name is not *Bosy* I might refer to her as such in a context in which the reference is otherwise reasonably clear. Note further that to reference his mother as a parent of someone is respectful, since, as we have seen, having children places you in the *ray-aman-dreny* class. By contrast, to have referenced his mother as the spouse of X would not have had this slight advantage, although it would have preserved the general respect inherent in referencing someone through one's family affiliation.

Besides referencing through third parties, a great many other linguistic means are available for personal reference. Agent nouns are commonly used. Thus on a particular occasion a boy might be referred to as a *mpiandry omby* "cow watcher" (from the verb *miandry* "to watch, guard" and *omby* "cow"). Such names of course, are particularly adaptable to the activity that the person to whom you are referring happens to be performing at the time of reference. Similarly, most predicates, adjectives, adverbs, and demonstratives may be combined with *ny* "the" to form a referential phrase. Thus *ny omaly* "the yesterday" could easily be used to refer to "the person who was here yesterday" and *ny mbola tsy tonga* "the still not come" to those who hadn't yet arrived.

Further, existential constructions with no noun phrases often fulfill functions for which we use noun phrases in English. A simple example of an existential construction would be *misy mitomany* "exist cry," meaning "there is crying going on" or more naturally "someone is crying." (Both *misy* "exist" and *mitomany* "cry" are ordinary verbs. Existential constructions always begin with *misy* and are frequently

followed by another verb.) However, suppose a brother of yours, well known to the village, comes looking for you. Someone who is coming to seek you out would most likely merely report *misy mitady* "exist looking for." There would be no need to say "exist looking for you" since the reference is clear from context, but neither is there mention of who is doing the looking.

In middle-class European or American society if someone who knew your brother well reported to you merely, "Someone was looking for you," you would be surprised to learn that the person was your brother and would likely infer that the person who reported the information did not have it firsthand and hence didn't actually know who was looking for you. But again, this would be an incorrect inference in the Malagasy situation.

5.2 Orders and Requests

The final case we shall consider concerns several linguistic aspects of ordering and requesting. Obviously giving someone an order is a confrontation experience, so when such is necessary we might expect the Malagasy to have recourse to means for "softening the blow." Such is in fact the case.

In English we give an order in the active voice, most usually omitting the addressee phrase "you." Thus we say "Wash those clothes": the verb "wash" is active (the passive would be "be washed [by]"). If the addressee phrase is present, it occurs as the subject and gives special emphasis as in "You wash those clothes right now!" When present, the subject phrase is the most prominent member of the sentence.

In Malagasy it is possible to form active imperatives by using the active form of the verb with the stress shifted to the right. Thus corresponding to "You are washing the clothes" *mánasa ny lamba ianao* (with stress marked on the first syllable of *manasa*), we have "(you) wash the clothes" *manasá lamba (ianao)*, where the addressee phrase *ianao* is usually omitted as in English but may occur for emphatic effect. But an active order in Malagasy is considered a highly brusque statement and a confrontation. It is used only in situations of stress or anger, and Europeans who frequently use active imperatives in Malagasy are often misinterpreted as being much more aggressive and authoritarian than they intend to be.

The normal form for an order is to put the verb in something other than the active voice, making the patient of the action or some circumstance of the action the subject phrase and hence the item on which attention is focused. The addressee phrase, again usually omitted, would occur as a passive agent or circumstantial agent if present. Thus the normal way to say "Wash the clothes" would be *Sasao (-nao) ny lamba*

highly valued way to express your appreciation to someone. Imagine, for example, a group of women arriving at your house, one of them with a chicken clucking and squirming under her *lamba*. You couldn't possibly remark upon the fact, or acknowledge the gift, until after much pleasant talk, serving tea, etc. Then finally one of the women would uncover the chicken and you would go through a reaction of surprise and appreciation.

Finally, regarding request behavior, the European may often find himself as having been understood to have made a request where in fact none was intended. For example, on one occasion, Edward, in making idle conversation with a neighbor, happened to remark on the large pile of sweet potatoes in front of the man's house. About twenty minutes later, having returned to our own house, we were surprised to see the man's son appear with a plate of two cooked sweet potatoes! On reflection, it was clear that our casual remark was interpreted as a request by our neighbor. So in adapting to this Malagasy norm, one must learn to both listen more attentively and to understate (by European standards) one's intentions.

5.3 Norms and Mitigating Circumstances

It would be incorrect to infer from our descriptions of Malagasy social behavior that the Malagasy are always uninformative, self-effacing, or that they never have confrontations. In the same way that in American society the norm of free exchange of information can be mitigated by other norms, like those of respecting the confidentiality relations between lawyer and client, priest and confessee, etc., so also we find that the Malagasy norms we have discussed may be mitigated in various ways. We have already seen, for example, that the norm of nonconfrontation applies less to women than to men.

Other general factors as well condition the application of these norms. Thus the directness of a request will vary with the magnitude of the request and the social relations that exist between the requester and the requestee. If the request is of small magnitude, as for a piece of tobacco, it is more likely to be made, all other things being equal, in a reasonably direct way. But if the request is major, as for a bride or for sizable assistance in a bone-turning ceremony, the request will certainly be indirect. Similarly, if the two parties are *havana* (a term that covers kinsmen and close acquaintances) the request is more likely to be direct. But if one of the parties is *vahiny* (outsider, stranger, foreigner), the request is almost certain to be indirect. If one of the parties is *vahiny* and the request is minor, or if the request is major and the parties are *havana*, the degree of directness will be adjusted to suit the particular circumstances, though always falling on the indirect side by European standards.

It is important to recognize the conditioning factors on speech

norms, since the quality of observation a visitor, say a field worker, can make will be conditioned by the role he occupies in the local social structure. Had we, for example, merely lived in a town and visited different villages, we would never have been on a *havana* basis with anyone. We might easily then have mistaken the norms for interaction with *vahiny* as being the norms for everyone. Nor would we have observed the differential applications of the norms with respect to men and women, since most interactions between outsiders and a village are mediated by the men of the village. The nonconfrontation norm applies less to women than to men, but on a daily basis women interact mostly with their immediate family, their children, or other women. Only men formally represent the family or the village to others, thus only men perform the major *kabary* at marriages or bone-turning ceremonies.

It was important then for the quality of observation that we live in a village and become *havana* rather than remaining *vahiny*. This not only enabled us to observe the variable application of speech norms, it actually enabled us to observe elementary syntactic facts about the language that otherwise we would not have been in a position to note. Thus, in addition to the standard address terms (*ianao* "you" [sg] and *ianareo* "you" [pl]), we found that there were many other second-person address terms whose usage was socially very restricted. For example, *ise* is used only to address people with whom one is on very close terms. The restrictions are much more severe, for example, than the use of familiar address terms in European languages. It would be highly unusual for a Malagasy and a European to use this form between them. And other pronominal forms are even more highly restricted. Thus *indroky* is largely restricted in usage to a mother talking to her child. It would never be used between a Malagasy and a European. Most grammars of Malagasy don't even mention the restricted pronouns.

In general then, an alert field worker must be able to assess how those in the situation he is observing place him in their social structure. Only then can he judge what distortion his very presence introduces into the range of phenomena he will be trying to observe and understand.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Malagasy Grammar

Cousins, W.E. *A Concise Introduction to the Study of the Malagasy Language*. London: Antananarivo Press of the London Missionary Society, 1894.

A concise but excellent traditional grammar.

Malzac, R.P. *Grammaire Malgache*. Paris: Société D'éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1926.

Longer and more thorough than Cousins but no more insightful.



FIGURE 3.1 The authors with the Razotovo family, who helped them find a residence in a small village and often served as language consultants. On the occasion of a visit to town (Antsirabe) June, 1970.

sentences from simpler ones. And the production of simple sentences requires that we know both the basic vocabulary of the language and which combinations of the vocabulary items yield understandable phrases and sentences. And finally, of course, we must know the basic sounds of the language and which combinations of sounds yield admissible words and phrases.

Competence in a language, however, requires much more than merely being able to form understandable sentences. A machine, however cleverly disguised as a human, which could only produce well-formed sentences on a random basis, would not be able, in general, to joke, tease, bargain, ask a favor, perform ritual oratory, or even, as we shall see, exchange ordinary information in a socially normal way.

To be a competent speaker of Malagasy (or of any language) then, one must be able to adhere to the complex norms of the society concerning language use in particular and personal interaction in general.

In the first part of the discussion to follow we shall concentrate on those aspects of word and sentence formation that are most novel to native speakers of English and hence require the greatest adaptation on their part. Later we shall discuss several social norms that make language behavior quite different from that prevalent in middle-class

American society. (We will have little to say about the sound system of Malagasy, as it presents few major difficulties for an English speaker. Malagasy sentences will be presented in the standard writing system, which corresponds overall quite closely to the pronunciation system. Occasional notes on spelling conventions will point out the few discrepancies.) First, however, we make some general remarks about the situation of the Malagasy people and language.

1 BACKGROUND

Malagasy, spoken in eighteen major dialects throughout the island of Madagascar (the large island off the east coast of Africa), constitutes a subgroup of the Austronesian family of languages (also called Malayo-Polynesian), and thus has a common ancestry with the languages of Indonesia, the Philippines, and Polynesia (see Figure 3.2). Our best evidence indicates that Madagascar was peopled early in the first millennium A.D. by settlers coming from somewhere in the Indonesian part of the world, probably travelling along the coast of the Indian Ocean, down the east coast of Africa, and across the Mozambique channel to what is now called Madagascar (or internationally, the Malagasy Republic—the name Madagascar itself is probably of Portuguese origin). Trade along these routes was largely controlled by the Arabs, and the first references we have to the Malagasy people come from Arab sources of this period. The Malagasy language itself attests to many obvious Arabic borrowings such as the days of the week: *Atalata* “Tuesday,” *Alarobia* “Wednesday,” etc. In fact the first writing in Malagasy was done in an Arabic script, although it never gained widespread use.

The first substantial European contact came through the English missionaries in the mid-nineteenth century. They established the current writing system, and several Malagasy words pertaining to writing or Protestant Christianity derive from this influence, for example, *boky* from “book,” *pastaora* from “Pastor,” etc. In fact the spelling convention whereby the long *ee* sound is written as *y* at the end of a word, as in *boky* above, derives from English influence. In the interior of a word, this sound is written *i*.

At the end of the nineteenth century, however, the French took over colonial control of Madagascar, and some of the current technical and administrative vocabulary of Malagasy as well as that of Catholic Christianity, derives from French sources, for example *savony* from French *savon* “soap,” *mompera* “priest” from French *mon père* “my father.” It is interesting to note, however, that despite the onslaught of European culture in the twentieth century, Malagasy has overall borrowed relatively few words from European languages. As we shall see,

- (3) *tany Antsirabe ny mpampianatra*
 there Antsirabe the teacher
 The teacher was in Antsirabe.

Further, as we shall see, much of the syntax of complex sentences in Malagasy depends on the behavior of subject phrases. Before considering this dependency, however, let us consider how to form verbs and noun phrases in order to combine them as illustrated in (1)–(3) to form simple sentences.

2.1.1 *Verbs* In several respects, the structure of Malagasy verbs seems quite simple compared to that of English. For example, in English and many European languages, the form of the verb varies with the person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) of the subject. Thus we say “I sing” but “John sings,” and “I am singing,” but “we are singing.” But in Malagasy the verb does not change form depending on the person and number of the subject. Thus “I sing” (or “I am singing”) is *mihira aho* (lit.: “sing I”), and “John sings” or “John is singing” is *mihira Rajaona* (lit.: “sing John”), and “we sing” or “we are singing” is *mihira izahay* (lit.: “sing we”).

As a second example, consider that English verbs may occur in a bewildering variety of forms together with auxiliary (or ‘helping’) verbs like “be,” “have,” and “do.” Thus from a simple verb like “sing” we have “John sings, is singing, sang, did sing, has sung, was singing, will sing, will be singing, will have sung,” etc. But in Malagasy there are no auxiliary verbs like “be,” “have,” and “do.” In fact there is no simple verb “to be” at all. Tense, then, is indicated very simply by the initial consonant on the verb. Almost all present-tense verbs begin with *m-* (as *manasa* “wash” and *mihira* “sing” above). To form the past tense, simply replace the initial *m-* by *n-* (e.g. *nihira aho*, “I sang”). And to form the future, replace the initial *m-* by *h-*. Thus *hihira aho* is “I will sing.” Further, Malagasy verbs do not distinguish progressive from nonprogressive forms (e.g. “I am singing” from “I sing”). Both receive the same translation in Malagasy, although if it is important to stress that an action is continuing, one can use independent adverbs like *mbola* “still.” Thus to indicate that someone is in the process of singing now and hasn’t yet stopped, you might say (4) below.

- (4) *mbola mihira izy*
 still sing he
 He is (still) singing.

Given a simple sentence like (5) below, the reader should now be able to form the Malagasy equivalents of “I drink milk,” “I am still drinking

milk,” “John drank milk,” “John was drinking milk,” “He will drink milk,” and “He will be drinking milk.”

- (5) *misotro ronono izahay*
 drink milk we
 We are drinking milk.

However, while some aspects of Malagasy verb structure appear simpler than English, others are clearly much more complex. The learner of Malagasy will be frustrated to find that almost none of the simple present-tense forms of verbs occurs as such in the Malagasy dictionaries (and there are some excellent ones). The reason is that verbs are in general formed by prefixing elements to what we shall call *roots*. For example, *mihira* “sing” is formed by adding the prefix *mi-* to the root *hira* meaning “song.” There are about a dozen such prefixes, and most of them can combine with most roots to form verbs. So dictionaries simply list the roots and indicate which prefixes may apply and what the meaning of the derived verb is. Thus to look up a verb in the dictionary, it is necessary to be able to determine its root. In the case of *mihira* above, the problem is simple. Once we know that *mi-* is one of the verb-forming prefixes, we may assume that the rest of the verb is the root. And further, *hira*, the rest of the verb in this case, occurs as a noun with the meaning “song,” so it is a form we know independently in the language.

But a more usual case is illustrated by *manasa* “wash.” Here the prefix is *man-* and the root is *sasa*. *Sasa* does not occur independently in the language as a word, and further, when the prefix *man-* is added, the initial consonant *s-* of the root is lost. So we cannot simply read off the root form by eliminating the prefix from *manasa* for that would yield only *asa*, which is not the root. Thus, to find *manasa* in the dictionary, it might appear as though we would have to look up all roots of the form *Xasa* where *X* is any consonant (we would also have to check for a root *asa*, since a root beginning with a vowel does not change in any way when the prefix *man-* is added).

Fortunately our dictionary checking does not have to be quite this tedious, for not just any consonant at the beginning of a root is dropped. The ones most commonly dropped are *f*, *h*, *k*, *p*, *t*, and *s*. For example, *man-* + the root *tolotra* = *manolotra* “to offer,” *man-* + *hadino* = *manadino* “to forget,” etc. On the other hand, consonants like *g*, *b*, *d*, and *z* as well as *l* and *r* at the beginning of roots are not dropped when *man-* is added, although certain other changes in pronunciation may take place. For example, while *man* + *dinika* = *mandinika* “to study,” we have *mandroso* “to progress” from *man* + *roso* and *mandeha* “to go” from *man* + *leha*, etc.

What principle can you give to describe, on the basis of the data at

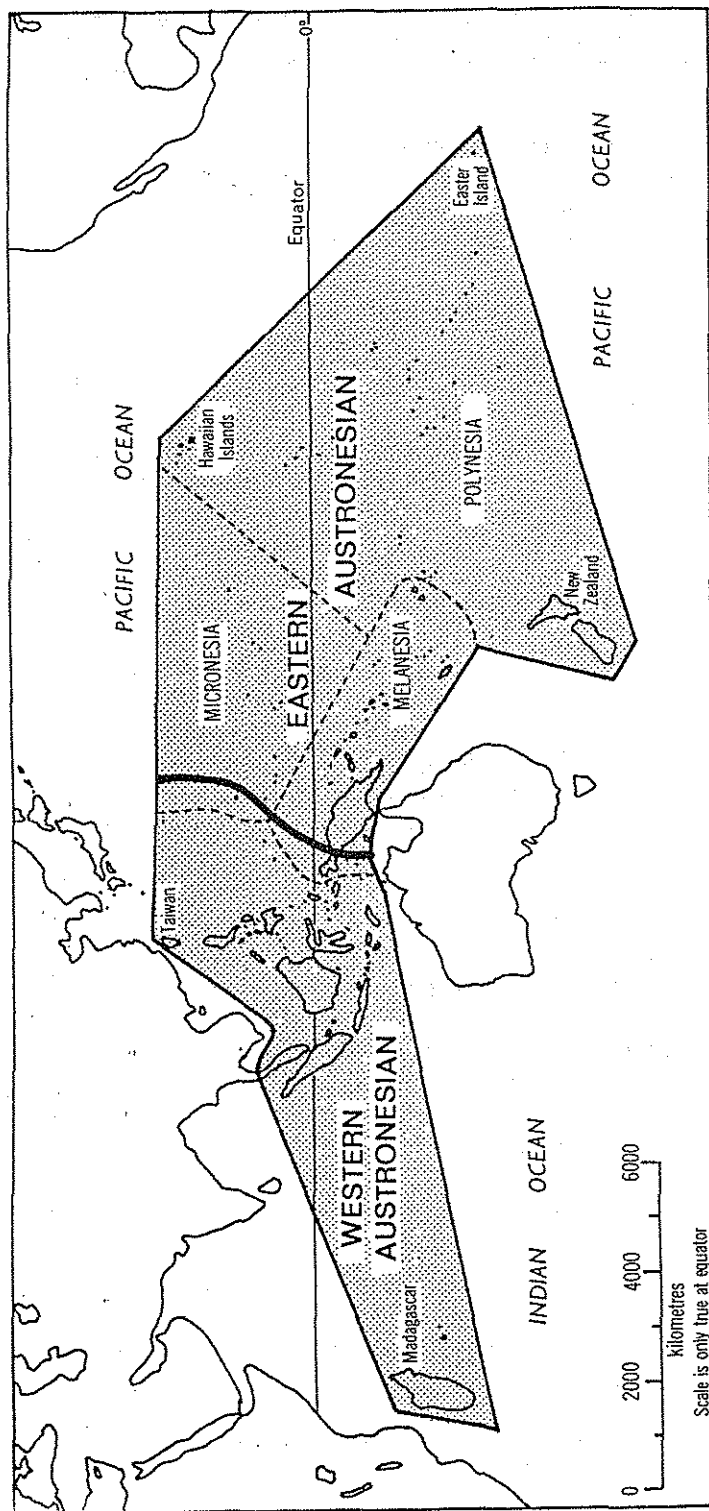


FIGURE 3.2 The Area Within Which Austronesian Languages Are Spoken. There are also several Austronesian languages spoken by minority groups in the southern part of Vietnam.

Source: Adapted with permission from "Austronesian Languages" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, 2:485, © 1974 by Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.

the structure of the Malagasy language enabled it to coin many of its words in a natural way for objects and activities of European origin. Currently, for example, schoolbooks in subjects such as geometry are written in Malagasy using largely words native to Malagasy.

2 FORMING SENTENCES IN MALAGASY

2.1 Simple Sentences

Let us consider a simple declarative sentence like (1) below, which might be used to express a statement of fact.

- (1) *manasa ny lamba amin'ity savony ity Rasoa*
 wash the clothes with this soap this Rasoa
 Rasoa is washing the clothes with this soap.

Under the Malagasy sentence we have put a word-for-word translation and then given the most natural translation in everyday English. Sentence (1) presents several striking differences from its English translation. In the first place, the verb occurs in initial position and is followed by the major noun phrases. This is already unusual; probably not more than 10 percent of the world's languages place the verb in initial position in simple (unemphatic) sentences. (The most common position for the verb is in the final position, as in Japanese, Hindi, and Basque. A close second in terms of frequency is for the verb to occur in second position, preceded by the subject of the sentence, as in English, modern Hebrew, and Swahili. Together these two word order types account for about 90 percent of the world's languages.)

Even more unusual, however, is the fact that in Malagasy the subject phrase, for example *Rasoa*, a woman's name in (1), occurs in sentence final position. At most, about a dozen of the world's five-thousand-odd languages are known to regularly place the subject in final position. Yet it would be a mistake to assume that the subject phrase in Malagasy is in any way less important in Malagasy sentence construction than, for example, the subject phrase in English. As in English, Malagasy subjects refer to the doer of the action, or as we shall say, the *agent*, in cases where the verb expresses an action (like *wash*, as opposed to, say, *need*). And as in English, the subject normally refers to the main thing the speaker is talking about, or as we shall say, the *topic* of the sentence. Thus in (2) and (3) below, although the main predicate does not express an action, the subject phrase still expresses the topic of discussion and occurs in the final position of the sentence.

- (2) *mpandratra any Antsirabe Rabe*
 carpenter there Antsirabe Rabe
 Rabe is a carpenter in Antsirabe.

hand, those consonants that drop and those that don't? Given the following roots, form the corresponding verbs:

man- + sorata	= <u>sorata</u> "to write"
man- + araka	= <u>araka</u> "to follow"
man- + haja	= <u>haja</u> "to respect"
man- + kaikitra	= <u>kaikitra</u> "to bite"
man- + lefa	= <u>lefa</u> "to send"

Of the many verbal prefixes in Malagasy, *mi-* and *man-* are the most commonly occurring ones that apply directly to roots (although there are several others). And many roots accept both prefixes, in which case the verb formed from *mi-* usually has an intransitive meaning, and the one formed from *man-* has a transitive meaning. Thus from *sasa* we form the transitive *manasa* "to wash (something)" and also *misasa* "to wash (oneself)." And from *araka* we form the transitive *manaraka* "to follow (someone)" and the intransitive *miaraka* "to be or go together with."

However, even when we have formed verbs from *mi-* or *man-*, it is still possible to add further prefixes to the derived verb. In this case the initial *m-* of *mi-* or *man-* is dropped and the new prefix added. Thus from *manasa* "to wash (something)" we could add the reciprocal prefix *mif-* yielding *mifanasa* "to wash each other." Or we could add the causative prefix *mamp-* yielding *mampanasa* "to cause (someone) to wash (something)" and so on.

It should be clear then that verbal structure in Malagasy is quite complex, though in a different way from English. Furthermore, the complexity we have discussed so far only concerns active verbs, that is, ones in which the subject/topic is the agent of the action. But as we shall see, Malagasy, like the languages of the Philippines, has elaborate ways of making nonagents into subject/topics, much as the passive voice in English ("John was hit by Mary" is the passive form of "Mary hit John") makes a nonagent into the subject/topic of the derived sentence since "John" is not the agent of the action. Rather it is he who undergoes the action, or as we shall say, is the *patient* of the action.

2.1.2 Nouns As with the formation of verbs in Malagasy, we find that the formation of nouns lacks certain of the complexities associated with nouns in European languages. For example, Malagasy nouns do not in general change form according to whether they refer to one or many

¹In general, roots that begin with unvoiced consonants, that is those that are not produced by making a noise with the vocal cords, like *t* as opposed to *d* or *k* as opposed to *g* etc., are dropped when the prefix *man-* is added. Roots beginning with voiced consonants generally either leave the consonant intact when *man-* is added or else change it in fairly systematic ways, e.g., *l* becomes *d* as in *mandeha* "to go" from *man-* + *leha*.

things. Thus *ny akoho* would translate, word for word, as either "the chicken" or "the chickens." Further, Malagasy lacks the gender system of languages like German and French. We don't have to know in Malagasy whether nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. Malagasy also lacks the case system of European languages. Thus, in general, we do not have one form of a noun (the nominative case form) if it functions as a subject and another form if it functions as an object. Compare for example (6) and (7) in which the two noun phrases in each sentence have the same form, differing only in position.

- (6) *nahita ny voalavo ny akoho*
saw the rat the chicken
The chicken saw the rat.

- (7) *nahita ny akoho ny voalavo*
saw the chicken the rat
The rat saw the chicken.

On the other hand, Malagasy nouns do evidence a complexity of a different sort. While many common nouns are themselves roots in the language, a great many others that name common objects of everyday use are derived from more basic structures. We consider here a few types.

Notice that proper names of people we have mentioned so far, *Rabe*, *Rasoa*, *Rajaona* all begin with *Ra-*. *Ra-* in fact is a prefix that indicates that the construction in which it occurs is a proper name. (This use of *Ra-* is largely limited to the major dialect of Malagasy, *Merina*. It is used for men's or women's names, but not for children's. For a child's name, one uses the prefix *I-*). What follows *Ra-* is either an adjective or a verb phrase. Thus *be* is an adjective meaning "big," so *Rabe* might be translated as "Mr. Big." Similarly *soa* is an adjective meaning "beautiful," so *Rasoa* might be translated as "Ms. Beautiful." (Note that *jaona* in *Rajaona* has no Malagasy meaning. It is simply the name "John" borrowed from English, but the particle *Ra-* is still added because it functions as a proper name.) For reasons of space the adjectives we have used in proper names have been short ones, but typical Malagasy names are quite long and may contain whole verb phrases. Thus *Ramanandraibe* is about an average-length name and means "Mr.-have-father-big" (*Ra-manana-rai-be*). Further, the systematic way of forming proper names from *Ra-* + predicates allows one to refer to someone with a name he has just made up using a predicate that is appropriate to the immediate situation. This is occasionally done in English, as when we say things like "Mr. Blabbermouth," although such use is unusual, perhaps childish. But in a Malagasy village, we might easily refer to an old white-haired woman whom we see in the fields but don't know as *Rafotsy* (Ms. White).

the final *a* drops and a *d* is inserted yielding the form we see in (10). How deceiving was the original apparent simplicity of the Malagasy verb!

Now we may, and very commonly do, form nouns from circumstantial verbs simply by adding *f-*. The resulting noun refers to some circumstance of the action indicated by the verb, such as the purpose, place, time, manner, etc. Thus from *anasana*, the circumstantial form of *manasa*, we can form *fanasana*, which might be used to refer to the manner of washing. In such cases we may still retain the agent and the patient phrases, as illustrated in (11).

- (11) *tena ratsy ny fanasan-dRasoa lamba*
very bad the washing-by Rasoa clothes

The way in which clothes are washed by Rasoa is very bad.

2.2 Adapting to European Vocabulary

Given the productive devices in Malagasy for forming verbs and nouns, we can now see how Malagasy survived the onslaught of European contact without having to borrow huge numbers of words designating concepts of European origin. For example, consider the general area of formal education. A few words like *boky* "book" and *sekoly* "school" were in fact borrowed. But most words pertaining to formal instruction are of Malagasy origin. Thus from a root *anatra* meaning "counsel, advice," we form the intransitive verb *mianatra* "to study, learn." And "student," of course, is just the agent noun *mpianatra*. The circumstantial form of the verb is *ianarana* (the final *-tra* part of roots usually drops or is modified in circumstantial forms, as are *-na* and *-ka*). And the circumstantial noun *fianarana* means "studying, learning, or studies." Further, if we form the causative verb from *mianatra*, we obtain *mampianatra* "to cause to study or learn," which is to say "to teach." The agent noun, *mpampianatra* then means, "teacher," and the circumstantial noun from this verb, *fampianarana*, as you might predict, means "instruction." Further, circumstantial nouns are often used to modify other nouns. Thus alongside *sekoly* "school" we can also use *trano fianarana* or *trano fampianarana* meaning "house for learning" and "house for teaching" respectively. This usage of circumstantial nouns is very common in naming the stores and shops introduced by European culture. From the root *varotra* we form *mivarotra* "to sell" and the circumstantial noun *fivarotana* "purpose, place, manner, etc. of selling." Combined with a noun like *trano* "house" we obtain *trano fivarotana*, which naturally means "house for selling" that is, "store." If we desire to specify what type of store, we merely retain the patient phrase of the verb from which the circumstantial noun is formed. Thus "bookstore" would be *trano fivarotam-boky*, "house for selling books."

3 MALAGASY SUBJECTS AND COMPLEX STRUCTURES

3.1 Subjects as Topics

In English, indeed in most languages, the subjects of simple sentences normally identify the main individuals (or objects) which the speaker is talking about—that is, the subject expresses the *topic* of the sentence. And perhaps more importantly, by identifying the topic, the subject phrase allows the hearer to guess how the *relevance* or *importance* of what is going to be said relates to what he already knows. Thus if I begin a sentence in English with "*John . . .*" I assume the hearer knows who I am talking about and has some idea of the relevance of what I will say; this in turn depends on what the hearer knows about John, including what may have been said about him in previous discourse.

Given that subjects occur sentence-finally in Malagasy, we might expect that the relevance function of subjects would not be prominent. Indeed it is often the case that the hearer must wade through a complex predicate phrase before he has an idea of how what is said relates to what he already knows or cares about. For example, in (12) below, several individuals are mentioned before the topic "John":

- (12) *nahita ny vehivavy izay nanasa ny zaza Rajaona*
saw the woman that washed the child John
John saw the woman who washed the child.

Nonetheless, subjects in Malagasy have perhaps a more prominent topic-relevance function than in English. Consider that to determine the relevance of what will be said, the topic phrase must succeed in identifying an individual (or individuals). Thus topic phrases are usually definite, as in proper names such as *John* and *Chicago*; or demonstrative noun phrases, such as *this man*; or noun phrases with a definite article, such as *the man* (which most usually serves to identify a man as the one already talked about in the discourse). On the other hand, indefinite noun phrases like *a man*, *some men*, *two men*, etc. do not identify individuals to the hearer and thus do not permit him to assess the relevance, or importance to him, of what will be said.

In English, however, it is quite possible for subjects to be indefinite, as in (13):

- (13) A woman was washing some clothes in the river.

Such a sentence is not primarily *about* some particular woman, since no such woman is identified. And upon hearing the phrase *a woman*, the hearer of (13) is not (usually) in a position to assess the relevance of what will be said. Thus *a woman* in (13) does not identify the topic of

itsy savony itsy still farther away, *iny savony iny* rather far indeed, *iroa savony iroa* still farther yet, and *iry savony iry* would mean that the soap is so far away from the speaker that he probably could not see it, so the use of this demonstrative would be bizarre, since the meaning of the demonstrative includes the idea that it is present to the speaker. Thus the visible/nonvisible marking is not so clearly differentiated in the demonstrative adjective series. It is possible nonetheless to infix *-za-* into most of the demonstrative adjectives, in which case the item need not be visible to the speaker. Thus from *io* we have *izao*, from *iny* we have *izany*, etc., but this infixing process is only of limited productivity.

Let us return now to some of the other ways of forming noun phrases. One common way is to replace the initial *m-* of a present-tense active verb (one in which the subject is the agent) by *mp-*. The resulting noun denotes "one who performs the action expressed by the verb." Thus from *manasa* we form *mpanasa* "one who washes," and from *mihira* we form *mpihira* "one who sings." Note that in sentence (2) the word for carpenter is such an agent noun. Thus from the root *rafitra* "something constructed" we add the *man-* prefix to form *mandrafitra* "to build, put together" and thence the agent noun *mpandrafitra* "carpenter, mason," etc. Such nouns are easy to form, but once again they are difficult to find in a dictionary, for in order to look them up, we must know the verb from which they are formed; and to find the meaning of the verb, we must know the root from which it is formed.

A second common way of forming nouns is by replacing the initial *m-* of active present-tense verbs with *f-*. Here the meaning of the derived noun is less systematically related to the meaning of the verb from which it is derived. But usually such nouns refer to some object closely associated with the action expressed by the verb. Thus from the root *vaki* "broken" we form the transitive verb *mamaky* "to cut, chop" (note that an initial *v-* in a root changes the *n-* of the prefix *man-* to *m*) whence we form *famaky* "hatchet." From the root *zaitra* we form *manjaitra* "to sew," whence we have *fanjaitra* "needle." (The *j* in Malagasy is pronounced like "dz" together.) Once again, then, to determine the meanings of such nouns, commonly used for names of everyday objects, it is necessary to be able to determine the meaning of verbs.

A final and even more productive way of forming nouns is based on what we shall call the circumstantial form of verbs. 'Circumstantial' here contrasts with active and passive. In an active verb, the agent is the subject. In a passive verb an object, usually the patient, is the subject. And in a circumstantial verb the subject is some circumstance of the action, such as the place or time at which the action was performed, the manner or purpose of the action, the instrument with which the action was performed, or the person for whose benefit the action was per-

formed. Consider for example sentence (1), for convenience repeated as (8) below.

- (8) *manasa ny lamba amin'ity savony ity Rasoa*
wash the clothes with this soap this Rasoa
Rasoa is washing clothes with this soap.

The verb in (8) is active, so the subject *Rasoa* denotes the agent of the action. In (9) below, however, the verb is passive and the subject, *ny lamba* "the clothes" is the patient of the action.

- (9) *sasan-dRasoa amin'ity savony ity ny lamba*
washed-by-Rasoa with this soap this the clothes
The clothes are washed by Rasoa with this soap.

Note that in (9) the derived subject *ny lamba* "the clothes" occurs in sentence final position where subjects in Malagasy go. The agent phrase in this sentence tacks onto the end of the verb in a characteristic and rather complicated way. (The passive form of the verb without an agent tacked on would be *sasana*, formed by adding *-na* to the root *sasa*. But when we put in the agent phrase, the final *a* of *sasana* drops. This should yield a form like *sasan-Rasoa*. But in Malagasy *n* never occurs directly before *r*. In such cases a *d* is then inserted, yielding in this case *sasan-dRasoa*.)

Now, in the same way that passive verbs take patients as subjects, so circumstantial verbs take as subjects nouns that refer to some circumstance of the action. Thus in (10) below *ity savony ity* "this soap" is the subject.

- (10) *anasan-dRasoa ny lamba ity savony ity*
wash-with-by-Rasoa the clothes this soap this
This soap is washed clothes with by Rasoa. (Or in more natural English, "This soap is used by Rasoa to wash clothes".)

Again the derived subject "this soap" occurs in sentence final position and loses its preposition *amina* since subject phrases never occur with prepositions.

The circumstantial form of the verb is derived from the active form (not directly from the root as is the case with passive forms) by deleting the initial *m-* and adding the suffix *-ana*, moving the stress to the right. So from *mánasa*, which has the stress on *man-*, we form *anasa* + *ana* (two *a* sounds together collapse into a single *a* sound), which yields *anasána* with the stress on the *sa*. As with passive forms, when circumstantial forms combine with an agent phrase beginning with *r-*,

phrase that occurs. Thus we must say literally, "Likes himself Rabe" or "Killed herself Rasoa" as illustrated below.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (20) <i>tia tena Rabe</i>
like self Rabe
Rabe likes himself. | (21) <i>namono tena Rasoa</i>
killed self Rasoa
Rasoa killed herself. |
|--|---|

(As with other pronouns in Malagasy the reflexive pronoun does not vary with the gender of the noun phrase to which it refers.) So it is that contrary to English and most European languages, Malagasy allows pronouns to precede their 'antecedents' in simple sentences.

3.3 Coordination

Similarly, when in certain closely connected contexts a noun phrase is understood to refer to the same entity more than once, we do not have to repeat it. This is the case, for example, if the topic of our discussion plays the role of subject in two coordinated clauses. In English instead of saying "John came early and John left late," we would usually say "John came early and left late," omitting the second occurrence of the subject "John." But in such a case in Malagasy it is the first occurrence of the subject that is normally omitted. Thus the most natural way to say (22a) below would be as in (22b)—waiting for the identification of the subject and topic "Rabe" until the very end. (Note that when two phrases, as opposed to sentences, are conjoined with "and" the conjunction used is *sy* rather than *ary*. *Ary* can only conjoin full sentences.)

- (22) a. *misotro taoka Rabe ary mihinam-bary Rabe*
drink booze Rabe and eat rice Rabe
Rabe is drinking booze and Rabe is eating rice.

- b. *misotro taoka sy mihinam-bary Rabe*
drink booze and eat rice Rabe
Rabe is drinking booze and eating rice.

Again, it seems funny to the European ear to omit a noun from a fairly simple sentence before we know to what it would refer. However, in this respect, the Malagasy ear listens to a different tune.

3.4 Relative Clauses

Another common way in many languages of the world to form complex structures from simpler ones is by moving parts of a simpler one to other positions and perhaps inserting a few other 'grammatical' words. Consider, for example, a simple sentence such as "The woman

washed the clothes." Suppose we want to talk about that woman, identifying her precisely as the one who washed the clothes. We might refer to her as "The woman *who* washed the clothes." We will refer to such structures as *relative clauses* and the noun that occupies the position of "woman" as the *head* of the relative clause. Notice that in the above example the head functions as the subject of the verb *washed* since it is the woman who is doing the washing. Had we relativized on the object of the verb, the resulting relative clause would have been "The clothes that the woman washed." So in this case the head of the relative clause would be functioning as the object of the verb.

Now, in English we may think of relative clauses as being formed from sentences by taking the noun phrase to be relativized and moving it to the front and perhaps inserting some grammatical words like "who" or "that." If we relativize on a subject, of course the noun phrase to be relativized is already at the front of the clause, so no movement is apparent. But when we relativize on an object, or any nonsubject, the movement to the front is apparent.

When we relativize on a subject phrase in Malagasy we also move that phrase to the front and optionally insert a particle *izay* "that." Compare the simple sentence in (23a) below with the relative clause formed on the subject in (23b).

- (23) a. *nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy*
washed the clothes the woman
The woman washed the clothes.
- b. *ny vehivavy izay nanasa ny lamba*
the woman that washed the clothes
The woman who washed the clothes.

However, if we attempt to relativize on the object, we find that the resulting relative clause is ungrammatical or nonsensical. Moving the object to the front and inserting *izay* would yield (24).

- (24) **ny lamba izay nanasa ny vehivavy*
The clothes that washed the woman.

(24) could only mean "the clothes that washed the woman," which would of course be comical since clothes can't wash people. In other words, in Malagasy the head noun of a relative clause *must* be understood to function as the subject of the verb.

But how then do we talk about "the clothes that the woman washed" in Malagasy? It might seem that we have a real gap in expressive power here. But such is not the case. We simply make the sentence from which we form the relative clause into the passive form,

discussion nor does it serve as a relevance indicator. Yet the phrase *a woman* is clearly, syntactically speaking, the subject of the sentence (e.g. it takes nominative pronouns, controls verb agreement, occurs in initial position, etc.). So subjects in English are not consistently topics or relevance indicators. But in Malagasy they are. Subjects in Malagasy must be definite. Thus (14) is categorically ungrammatical.

- (14) **manasa zaza vehivavy*
wash child woman

A woman is washing children.

How would we express the idea in (14) in Malagasy? The principal way would be to use an existential construction, as in (15).

- (15) *misy vehivavy manasa zaza*
exist woman wash child

A woman is washing children. (Literally "[there] is a woman washing children.")

We note that *misy* is a normal verb taking present, past, and future tenses, having imperative forms ("let there be..."), circumstantial forms, etc. It usually translates the "hard core" notions of existence seen in (16) and (17).

- (16) *misy liona any Afrika*
exist lion there Africa

There are lions in Africa.

- (17) *misy Andriamanitra*
exist God

God exists.

Sentences like (15) in English and Malagasy then lack topics and relevance indicators. And in Malagasy they also lack subjects. We note, for example, that *vehivavy* "woman" in (15) does not have the syntactic properties of subjects in Malagasy. For example, we cannot relativize it. That would yield the ungrammatical (18).

- (18) *(ny) *vehivavy izay misy manasa zaza*
the woman that exist wash child

The woman who there is washing children.

We should further note that if the agent phrase in sentences like (15) is fully indefinite, as *someone* in English, there would most usually be no noun phrase at all following the existence verb!

- (19) *misy manasa zaza*
exist wash child

Someone is washing children.

This indeed is one of the ways of avoiding direct reference to individuals, and as we shall see, avoiding direct reference to individuals is often very important in Malagasy society.

The role of subjects as topics gives us reason to believe that despite its final position, the category of subject is very important in Malagasy syntax. In fact, we have already seen another piece of evidence in support of this. For we can think of 'passive' and 'circumstantial' as ways of converting various types of nonsubjects into subjects. These operations, or as we shall say, transformations, move the appropriate nonsubject to subject position, sentence final; eliminate whatever prepositions the noun phrase may have carried; and put the verb into a characteristic form. But there are no transformations in Malagasy that systematically convert, for example, nonobjects into objects, or noninstrumentals into instrumentals. The only noun phrase into which others can be converted is the subject noun phrase. Further, many other ways of transforming certain sentences into others also apply, in one way or another, to subjects. We now consider examples of several such processes.

3.2 The Reflexive Construction

In English when we want to indicate in a simple sentence that the agent and the patient are the same, we normally put the sentence in an active form and present the patient phrase as a reflexive pronoun, as in "John likes himself" or "Mary killed herself." This process is usually described by saying that when two noun phrases refer to the same thing, the second can be replaced by a pronoun (in the above cases by a reflexive pronoun). But for English we could equally well describe this process by saying, as we did above, that in an active sentence the direct object (or the patient phrase) becomes a reflexive pronoun and the subject phrase remains as is. Since the direct object occurs after the subject, the two descriptions are equivalent for English. But in Malagasy the direct object occurs before the subject, so the two descriptions give different predictions in this case. If the second noun phrase were to become the reflexive pronoun, we would expect to say "likes John himself" for "John likes himself," whereas if the object noun phrase becomes the reflexive pronoun, we would expect to say "likes himself John." And it turns out that the subject-object distinction is more important in Malagasy than the left-right order distinction. That is, it is the object phrase that becomes a reflexive pronoun, not the second noun

Suppose someone claims "John thinks that Mary washed these clothes" and that sometime later we want to refer to those clothes. In English we may easily form the appropriate relative clause *the clothes that John thinks Mary washed*. But in Malagasy such relative clauses would seem impossible to form, since *clothes* is clearly not the subject of the main verb *think*. Further, we cannot use the passive or circumstantial voices to make it into the subject of *think*, since these voices would only apply to noun phrases that occur in the main clause, and *clothes* occurs in an embedded or subordinate clause. Thus *Mary washed the clothes* is itself a sentence that occurs embedded within the larger sentence *John thinks that Mary washed the clothes*. It might appear once more that Malagasy has an expressive gap. But such is not the case, for Malagasy has a very productive means of *raising* embedded noun phrases into main clauses, whence they can be made into subjects by the voicing system and then relativized (or questioned, or otherwise moved).

We shall illustrate the 'raising' first in English. In sentence (30a) the noun phrase *the woman* occurs within a sentence itself embedded within the entire sentence.

- (30) a. John thinks that the woman washed the clothes
 b. John thinks the woman to have washed the clothes

In (30b) however, the phrase *the woman* is presented as a direct object of the main verb *think*. Thus it occurs immediately after that verb, it takes accusative forms of the pronoun (to give *her* instead of *she* as in *John thinks her to have washed the clothes* as opposed to *John thinks that she washed the clothes*), and it can passivize the subject, as in *the woman was thought to have washed the clothes*. It appears clear then that the embedded noun phrase *the woman* in (30a) has been raised to main clause position in (30b).

This raising process in English, however, is of only limited productivity. Some native speakers of English find sentences like (30b) awkward or pretentious. Their acceptability varies with the choice of main verb.

Thus most speakers would probably not allow *the woman* to be raised from *John said that the woman washed the clothes*, which would yield *John said the woman to have washed the clothes*. Similarly, it would be unacceptable for most speakers to say *John hoped the woman to have washed the clothes* and *John doubted the woman to have washed the clothes*.

But in Malagasy the raising process is fully productive. Basically all verbs of thinking and saying allow an embedded noun phrase to be

raised as an object of the main verb. We illustrate this in (31)³, where (31a) indicates the underlying sentence and (31b) the derived one. The embedded sentence is indicated by brackets.

- (31) a. *mihevitra* [fa *nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy*]
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman

Rajaona
 Rajaona

Rajaona thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

- b. *mihevitra ny vehivavy ho nanasa ny lamba*
 thinks the woman that washed the clothes

Rajaona
 Rajaona

Rajaona thinks the woman to have washed the clothes.

Clearly *ny vehivavy* "the woman" looks and behaves like a direct object of the main verb *mihevitra* "think." Thus it immediately follows that verb, and it takes accusative forms of the pronoun, *azy* as opposed to *izy* (see example (4) for the use of the nominative form *izy* in a simple sentence). And finally of course, since *ny vehivavy* "the woman" is the object of the main verb, it can now passivize to the subject, as in (32).

- (32) *heverin-dRajaona ho nanasa ny lamba ny*
 thought-by-Rajaona that washed the clothes the
vehevavy
 woman

The woman was thought by John to have washed the clothes.

And now, since "the woman" is the subject of the sentence, it can be relativized, as in (33).

³The structure in (31a) indicates the source for the raising process. As it stands, however, it is not acceptable, since most speakers of Malagasy will not accept a full sentence to occur between the main verb and its subject. Thus if no noun phrase is raised from the embedded sentence, the main clause must be removed to the right of the subject phrase yielding the unusual Verb + Subject + Object order (considering the embedded sentence to be the object of the verb "think") illustrated in (a) below.

(a) *mihevitra Rajaona fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy*
 thinks Rajaona that washed the clothes the woman

John thinks that the woman ...

so that "the clothes" is the subject, and then we can relativize on "the clothes" yielding "the clothes that were washed by the woman." (25a) below illustrates the passive form of (23a) above, and (25b) the relative clause formed on "clothes."

- (25) a. *nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba*
washed-by-the woman the clothes
The clothes were washed by the woman.
- b. *ny lamba izay nosasan'ny vehivavy*
the clothes that washed-by-the woman
The clothes that were washed by the woman.

Similarly in Malagasy it is not possible to relativize on any nonsubject noun phrase. If, for example, we want to relativize on an instrumental, as in "the soap that Rasoa washed clothes with," we must first put the verb in the circumstantial form so that the instrumental noun phrase is the derived subject, and only then may we relativize on it. In this way the thing we are talking about within the relative clause, the topic, is always the subject. Thus from (26a) below, we cannot directly relativize on "the soap," which would yield (26b), a meaningless expression in Malagasy. Rather we must first convert (26a) to the circumstantial form in (26c), where "soap" is the subject, and then relativize it, as in (26d).

- (26) a. *manasa lamba amin'ny savony Rasoa*
wash clothes with the soap Rasoa
Rasoa washes clothes with the soap.
- b. **ny savony izay manasa lamba Rasoa*
The soap that washes clothes Rasoa
- c. *anasan-dRasoa lamba ny savony*
washes-with-by-Rasoa clothes the soap
The soap is used by Rasoa to wash clothes.
- d. *ny savony izay anasan-dRasoa lamba*
the soap that washes-with-by-Rasoa clothes
The soap used by Rasoa to wash clothes.

It turns out then that the system of verb voices—active, passive, and circumstantial—plays a much greater role in the syntax of Malagasy than does the more limited system of active vs. passive forms in English; and further, the role of 'subject' is much greater in Malagasy since only subjects can be relativized.

3.5 Information Questions

Furthermore, what holds of relative clause formation in Malagasy also holds, to a greater or lesser extent, for all processes that form complex structures from simpler ones by moving elements. Consider, for example, questions of the "who? what? when? where?" sort. In both English and Malagasy the principal way of forming such questions puts the question word in the front of the clause, as illustrated in (27) and its English translation.

- (27) *Iza no nanasa ny lamba?*
Who part washed the clothes
Who washed the clothes?

Note that following the question word in Malagasy there is a grammatical particle *no*, which serves to isolate the question word and to emphasize it. Again however, (27) illustrates the case where the subject of the verb has been questioned. If we try to question the object by moving the appropriate question word forward we get the nonsensical (28). The only correct way to ask "What did the woman wash?" is as in (29) in which the question word "what?" functions as the subject of the verb, and the question is literally "What was washed by the woman?"

- (28) **Inona no nanasa ny vehivavy?*
What part washed the woman
What did the woman wash?
- (29) *Inona no nosasan'ny vehivavy*
What part washed-by-the woman
What was washed by the woman?

Once again then, in the simple cases cited, only subjects can be moved, in this case questioned, and once again the voicing system comes into play to make these noun phrases we want to question into subjects. Clearly then if we lost the voicing system in Malagasy, the rest of the syntax would have to change in radical ways. In particular the basic methods of forming questions and relative clauses would have to change. In English on the other hand, the loss of the passive voice would not entail many serious consequences for the grammar, for basically no major syntactic operations in English require the sentence on which they operate to be passive.

3.6 Raising

We conclude this section with consideration of a more complex example of Malagasy syntax that indicates the overwhelming role played by the notion of 'subject' in Malagasy.

4 CONDITIONS ON THE USE OF SPEECH

The European learner of Malagasy who had perfected his knowledge of the sound system of the language and the various ways of forming words, phrases, and sentences would, as we indicated at the beginning of our discussion, still find himself unable to perform successfully most social acts requiring the use of speech in the type of peasant community in which we lived.

He would frequently draw many incorrect inferences from what people said and equally frequently fail to draw correct inferences. In addition he would frequently be misunderstood and find that his attempts at communication prompted reactions quite different from those he intended.

The general reason for such unsuccessful communication is that the norms of social interaction in Madagascar are different in many respects from those of European society. This point is easy to acknowledge in the abstract but difficult to understand in practice. Hence, in this section we will describe the differences in communication norms in terms of our personal experiences, which led us to adapt our speech habits to those of the Malagasy context.

To explain the types of misunderstandings that can occur, we shall first discuss several general conditions on the use of speech in a Malagasy peasant community and then illustrate how these conditions affect the interpretation of most socially normal everyday discourse.

4.1 The Information Structure of a Malagasy Peasant Community

The area in which we lived consists of many small villages scattered across a hilly, formerly volcanic area. Rice, the staple crop, is grown in the lower areas near the springs and small creeks; the villages themselves are located on the higher ground. An unpaved road, passable by car though sometimes cut off during the rainy season, links these villages to a somewhat larger road leading to the closest town (pop: 3,000–4,000).

In such communities new information, that is, information not known to the population at large, is properly described as a *scarce good*. Access to news from outside the community is difficult. Very few people are literate, and practically no one has a radio. Newspapers, magazines, and portable radios can be obtained in towns but must be paid for in cash—a commodity that is very limited in a subsistence or near-subsistence economy. Consequently information from outside the community is hard to obtain and must pass from person to person, community to community, by word of mouth. (Compare this situation with the deluge of new information that a middle-class American is subjected to everyday via newspapers, radio, and television.)

Furthermore, new information originating from within the com-

munity is also rare. Within a given village, everybody knows everybody else, and everybody knows most people in the closely neighboring villages. A typical household spends most of its day working in the fields and hence is in public view of everybody else. And as one's rice plot is normally within view of one's house, the people you live with are also the people you work with. Relatively few events occur on a day-to-day basis that are not publicly observable (although there are, of course, family squabbles). The most important unpredictable events to an agricultural people concern the weather, something again that is immediate public knowledge. In addition, within such communities there is very little specialization of labor. It is unusual for your neighbor to have a skill or occupation that you are not at least reasonably able in yourself, so it is unlikely that something would happen to him that wouldn't happen to you.

The regularity of day-to-day life is even more apparent on a larger time scale. The yearly cycle of events is largely determined by the rice planting, cultivating, and harvesting cycle. After the harvest there are about two months in which the ceremony season takes place, and during that time one does have the occasion to meet more people from outlying villages. However, even one's life cycle is, in general, predictable. A child is gradually initiated into the work cycle and when strong enough, assumes his or her full share. The child can expect to pursue that same work until he dies and can expect to live in the same locality where he was born, or at most move once to a newer village as land becomes scarce in his home village.

Consequently, any sort of new information is at a premium; and, someone who has, for example, been to market and found out something not generally known will find himself the center of interest until the information is divulged. So, in order to remain the center of attention, one imparts new information only piece by piece. As we shall see, eliciting what might appear to an outsider to be fairly trivial information is a lengthy and difficult process.

4.2 Collective vs. Individual Action

A second condition of Malagasy peasant life that governs much interpersonal behavior including speech behavior is the norm of collective responsibility for action. It would be *exceedingly* unusual in the communities we are discussing for an individual, as such, to initiate an important action and assume responsibility for it. There are two major 'units of responsibility' within a village: families, and the village "elders" (*ray-aman-dreny*, literally, "father-and-mother"). The concepts of family and of *ray-aman-dreny* are not independent and are central to understanding norms of personal action in Malagasy life.

A family is composed of the descendents of a given ancestor plus

- (33) *ny vehivavy izay heverin-dRajaona ho nanasa*
 the woman that thought-by-Rajaona that washed
ny lamba
 the clothes

The woman who John thought washed the clothes.

Notice in passing that when we raise a noun phrase from an embedded sentence, the subordinator *fa* changes to *ho* but otherwise the embedded sentence remains unchanged.⁴

Notice finally that the noun phrase we have raised to main clause object in Malagasy is originally the subject of the embedded verb. And in fact only subjects of embedded verbs may be raised. However, our original question was how to say *the clothes that John thought the woman washed*. Now looking at sentence (34) below, it is clear that *ny lamba* "the clothes" is not the subject of the embedded verb but rather the object.

- (34) *mihevitra [fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy]*
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman
Rajaona
Rajaona

Rajaona thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

At this point, the reader should be able, by successive application of the syntactic processes discussed so far, to form a Malagasy relative clause that translates *the clothes that John thought that the woman washed*. We shall present the answer immediately below, however, to make the conclusion of this last section clear.

To relativize on *ny lamba* "the clothes" in (34) above, we must reorganize the syntax of the sentence so that *ny lamba* is the main clause subject. Now, since *ny lamba* occurs embedded, we might hope to raise it to main clause object position and then passivize it to subject. But *ny lamba* cannot be directly raised because only subjects of embedded verbs can be so raised, and *ny lamba* is the object, not the subject of the embedded verb *nanasa* "washed." (Note that if we did directly raise *ny lamba* from (34), we would obtain a sentence that would be translated as *John thinks the clothes to have washed the woman*. That is, "the clothes" would be necessarily understood as the subject of "wash," and hence it would be the woman who got washed by the clothes!) However, we can easily make *ny lamba* into the subject of

⁴In English on the other hand, the identity of the embedded sentence is more severely affected. The tense marking on the verb is lost, and the verb takes an infinitival form ("to have washed the clothes" as opposed to "washed the clothes").

the embedded sentence by passivizing the embedded verb *nanasa* "washed." Then *ny lamba* can be raised to become the object of the main verb *mihevitra* "thinks," then it can be passivized to main clause subject, and finally it can be relativized, yielding (35).⁵

- (35) *ny lamba izay heverin-dRajaona ho*
 the clothes that thought-by-Rajaona that
nosasan'ny vehivavy
 washed-by the woman

The clothes that were thought by John to have been washed by the woman (or more colloquially, "The clothes that John thought that the woman washed").

Clearly then the notion of 'subject' is not an unimportant one in Malagasy syntax, despite its occurrence in sentence final position. Rather, much of the major syntax of Malagasy is organized around ways to make different noun phrases into subjects. Thus we can now understand why the Malagasy voicing system and the raising process are much more developed and productive than the corresponding systems in English: they have a much greater functional role, since they make noun phrases accessible to major syntactic processes like relativization and question formation, and generally serve to place topics in subject position.

⁵We begin with sentence (a) below:

- (a) *mihevitra [fa nanasa ny lamba ny vehivavy] Rajaona*
 thinks that washed the clothes the woman Rajaona
 John thinks that the woman washed the clothes.

Then we passivize the embedded verb:

- (b) *mihevitra [fa nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba] Rajaona*
 thinks that washed-by-the woman the clothes Rajaona
 John thinks that the clothes were washed by the woman.

Then we raise the subject of the embedded verb to become the object of the main verb:

- (c) *mihevitra ny lamba ho nosasan'ny vehivavy Rajaona*
 thinks the clothes that washed-by-the woman Rajaona
 John thinks the clothes to have been washed by the woman.

Then we passivize the main verb, making *ny lamba* "the clothes" the main clause subject:

- (d) *heverin-dRajaona ho nosasan'ny vehivavy ny lamba*
 thought-by-Rajaona that washed-by-the woman the clothes

The clothes were thought by John to have been washed by the woman.

Now we may relativize on *ny lamba*:

- (e) *ny lamba izay heverin-dRajaona ho nosasan'ny vehivavy*
 the clothes that thought-by-Rajaona that washed-by-the woman

The clothes that were thought by John to have been washed by the woman.

place within a tomb. While the ancestors are out of the tomb, much dancing and singing goes on. People may talk to their ancestors, inform them of recent happenings, perhaps confess for misdeeds they have done, and even give them a little rum. When the ancestors are returned to the tomb, new cadavers that were buried temporarily in shallow graves near the tomb (opening a tomb requires government permission and may only take place every few years) will also be taken into the tomb. This ceremony usually lasts a night and a day, requires marshaling together the entire extended family, and is in general an expensive and festive affair.

One of the major fears of a Malagasy is to die away from his family tomb and so not be able to be buried there. For example, when our villagers learned that men had been sent to the moon, the first question they expressed was "Where would they be buried if they died there?" The greatest shame a Malagasy can know is to be deprived of the right to be buried in the family tomb. This would mean that he would not be a member of the family and not be an ancestor. Even Malagasy who have left the country to work in a city feel a strong moral obligation to attend a family *famadihana* and are always returned to the family tomb for their burial.

The other major line of responsibility within a village is constituted by the *ray-aman-dreny*. People are *ray-aman-dreny* to the extent that they have offspring and hence will be ancestors. Any important *ray-aman-dreny* belongs to a family and has children and grandchildren. To be a couple without children is shameful. Marriages that do not produce children within the first year are under strong family pressure to dissolve. Normally upon marriage a woman moves to the village of her husband (though exceptions to this in our area were not uncommon). If she has children, she becomes part of the husband's family and is buried in his tomb. But if she has no children and withstands the pressure to leave her husband and return to her village, she will still not be buried in the tomb of the husband's family but rather in the tomb of her parents—the ultimate proof that she has not attained *ray-aman-dreny* status.

Members of a family (on the same side of the *ray-aman-dreny* line) are almost fully egalitarian. They share the same living quarters, working conditions, and possessions. It would be quite normal, for example, for a city cousin to return for a visit wearing European-style clothes (rather than the traditional togalike *lamba*). Upon arrival he might don a relative's traditional garb and shortly thereafter you would see his brothers and sisters wearing various pieces of his European clothing around the village.

Most actions then are taken by families or the *ray-aman-dreny* and not by individuals. This is true not only for the regular major activities like rice cultivation, but also for any sudden, unpredictable activity of any importance. For example, if a *ray-aman-dreny* dies suddenly, his

family in his village and in the closely neighboring villages has the responsibility for the funeral. (This is the burial in the temporary grave near the family tomb and is not a major ceremony.) However, the other *ray-aman-dreny* of the deceased's village and their families will share in the preparations as well. No one individual assumes responsibility for effecting the entire undertaking. Women from many different households, whether of the deceased's family or not, will help in cooking the food for those who attend and will help out in other ways. A dozen men might easily contribute their effort to construct a coffin for the deceased. We once saw six different men participate in turn and sometimes jointly in the sawing of a *single* board for a coffin! Should it turn out upon the transferral of the body to the family tomb a year or two later that the coffin was not well constructed, no one individual would be to blame.

Under these conditions, then, very little is done to draw attention to any one person's particular abilities. For example children who might be exceptionally good at some task, for instance rice pounding, are *never* complimented for their abilities. They are normally described as *tsy mahay* "not able."

It is interesting to consider in this light, the situations that do force an individual to stand out from the rest. Few such situations arise in the natural Malagasy context, but one major one is the speech making that accompanies the opening of the family tomb at a *famadihana* or the formal request for a girl in marriage by the *ray-aman-dreny* of the boy's family. (These requests have the form of a debate or speech contest in which the boy's family loses, pays the brideprice, and leaves with the girl.)

The formal speeches on such occasions are called *kabary* and those who perform them *mpikabary* (from the verb *mikabary*). Being a *mpikabary* is a highly valued skill and requires a thorough knowledge of traditional lore, proverbs, and the structure of ceremonies and also requires exceptional ability to turn a good phrase. Within any community certain people are known to be good *mpikabary*. But giving a *kabary* and responding to your opponent (in the case of a marriage *kabary*) is an action that singles out the *mpikabary* as having special, personal abilities. And inwardly, of course, a good *mpikabary* is proud of his abilities and accomplishments. But outwardly the *mpikabary* is in the very awkward position of having to distinguish himself from his equals. So, in fact, such events are structured in such a way as to minimize his individuality. Thus the *mpikabary* will stand in a group with the other *ray-aman-dreny* of the family. His speeches will inevitably begin with a long and artful apology for his lack of ability. He will also stress that the words he uses are not his own and that he is merely the carrier of the words from the family and the ancestors. It is this last point, that he merely carries the words of others, that absolves him of



those brought into the line of descent by marriage. Within a village, members of a given household belong to the same family. A normal household consists of parents plus their children, often ten to twelve in number. Grandparents usually live in separate houses and if they have no small children of their own will take to live with them the first born of one of their children. Within a village, members of the same family work their rice land in common, though each household may have possession of particular plots. The whole family, men, women, and children, participates in the cultivation of the rice plots. Certain work is usually done by women, such as the transplanting of the seedlings from the seed beds to the main beds; other work is done by men, such as preparing the main beds for planting; while other work is done in common, such as harvesting the main beds. The whole family, then, and no one single individual, is responsible for the rice crop.



FIGURE 3.3 *Tombs, Individual Oratory, and Collective Responsibility.* On the left page, an orator delivering a *kabary* from the top of a tomb. Above, a work party building a tomb.

As a given person may have married and separated more than once, more or less formally, individuals may have several possibilities for deciding from which principal ancestor they are descended. But in practice, family membership at any given moment is usually clear, since it imposes severe obligations in terms of mutual help in rice cultivation and upkeep of the family tomb. The family you belong to is determined by the tomb in which you will be buried. The tombs are massive stone vaults, partly above ground and partly below, containing various stone beds on which cadavers are laid out in expensive raw silk cloths during special ceremonies. These cloths and the general upkeep of a tomb are much more expensive than, for example, upkeep on one's house. (A house is normally made of sun-dried bricks with rice stalk roofs and is more easily built and destroyed than a family tomb.)

Psychologically the ancestors in one's tomb are very much a part of one's family. Every few years a family will have a major ceremony, called *famadihana*, "the turning (of the bones)." (*Famadihana* is the circumstantial noun from *mamadika*, "to turn.") At the *famadihana* the tombs are opened, the ancestors are brought out and rewrapped in new cloths. Cadavers that are reduced to a pile of bones are put in the collective ancestor cloth located in the rear of the tomb, the most sacred

investigate the plots in question and found the *ray-aman-dreny* patching up parts of some dikes that had been damaged. Some of the plots did have rice that was bent over, but the plots were mostly intact. So there was no tragedy, just a small loss at worst. However, it would be incorrect to infer that the Malagasy were inaccurate observers of the reported loss. Rather, since something bad had occurred, they portrayed it at its worst, lest in hoping for something better they be deceived and therefore shamed. Probably the single most inconceivable act for Malagasy peasants would be to brag, before the harvest, about what a great crop they were anticipating.

Another type of action that would bring shame to all participants would be to affront or confront someone directly. Any action that would put someone "on the spot," and so draw attention to an individual (especially oneself) would fall under this category. Thus in day-to-day interactions, individuals are very rarely held explicitly accountable for their actions. Suppose two people more or less agree to meet somewhere and go to market together (note that by the norm of noncommittalism it is unlikely that there would have ever been a fully explicit commitment to meet at a certain place at a certain time). Then suppose one of them doesn't show up. Although he might at a later time offer some explanation for his behavior, it is most unlikely that he would be called upon to do so. Or if a local pastor (whose pay is usually quite low) is found to have been dipping into the collection plate, he might find that under pressure from the *ray-aman-dreny* of the locality, higher church officials have decided to reassign him to another locality. However, it is most unlikely that he would actually be accused of stealing or would be forced to return the money.

Other types of sanctions are available against the transgressor of a norm or law. His family may simply avoid cooperating with him, and the norm of nonconfrontation prevents him from holding them accountable for lack of cooperation. At another time he may find himself the object of malicious, and very possibly totally untrue, gossip.

Overall the norm of nonconfrontation is certainly understandable to the European mind. What is peculiarly Malagasy is the array of actions that are counted as affronting. In rural Malagasy society any action that forces an individual to acknowledge individual responsibility for something or to commit himself explicitly to a future course of events is counted as a confrontation.

We should mention further that the norm of nonconfrontation does not apply equally to both sexes. Men, especially *ray-aman-dreny*, are expected to adhere to this norm much more thoroughly than women. Thus if a child misbehaves, its mother, or another woman of the village, can easily scold the child and hold it accountable for its actions. A man however, would more usually not do this, even if it meant delaying punishment for a considerable period, say until the mother returned

from market. Once, for example, when the man who owned the house we lived in returned to the village to inspect some of his rice land he found that the white mud coating over the bricks on the house had been damaged by the village children who were using the wall to kick a ball against. He remained in the village for two days and occasionally suggested to the parents of the children that something ought to be done about it. But the suggestion was simply overlooked. On the third day he left and returned with his wife who vociferously lit into the first man (in fact, a *ray-aman-dreny*) she met upon entering the village.

As a general rule women do most of the buying and selling in markets (though men do certain heavy tasks like butchering and selling meat). Buying and selling in these communities normally involves bargaining, with one party refusing to pay an initial price, and the other party refusing to sell too cheap. Bargaining involves lots of small confrontations and definite decisions, and women, less subject to the norm of nonconfrontation, are the more natural buyers and sellers.

5 BEHAVIORAL NORMS AND SPEECH USAGE

The behavioral norms we have discussed have serious consequences for speech behavior. We mentioned previously that a European who could merely produce and understand sentences in Malagasy would very frequently misunderstand the intent of someone's speech and be frequently misunderstood himself. We shall consider two types of speech situations where a European speaking Malagasy would fail to make correct inferences.

5.1 The Everyday Exchange of Information

Most everyday conversations involve the exchange of information in one way or another. In middle-class Western society certain norms regarding such exchanges enable us to infer from what was said much more information than was made verbally explicit. In particular, we assume that our conversational partner will provide the information relevant to our needs if he has it, unless there are specific mitigating circumstances. Such circumstances are admittedly quite diverse, some may be quite general and others specific to the particular speech situation. For example, if we're talking with a lawyer about a client, a psychiatrist about a patient, or a priest about someone he confesses, we may expect that certain information will not be given freely. Or if the information we require of someone is particularly personal, he might not want to divulge it. Another possibility is that our partner might want to tease us, deceive us, or play some sort of joke on us. All of these factors limit access to information in Western society, but they are understood

the individual responsibility for his actions. Consider, for example, the following early lines from one *kabary* we recorded.

—Manao azafady aho, fa tsy tompon'ity... tsy tompon-dalana fa mpanohy, tsy tompon-dia fa mpanaraka... tsy tompon-teny fa mpindrana.

—I excuse myself, for (I) am not a master of this... not an originator of paths but a continuer, not an originator of journeys but a follower... not an originator of words but a *borrower*.

Other instances in which an individual is singled out from the group frequently occur in contact situations with Europeans. For example, one of our best informants was a young man from a neighboring village who made a four-hour trek to the town school every day. We thought to compensate him by providing him with a bicycle. But we quickly realized that this would do him a great disservice because it would be an object for him alone, and it could not easily be shared since most of the time he would be using it himself. This would have made him the object of jealousy, a dangerous emotion in an egalitarian community. In general it is not uncommon for Malagasy who work for Europeans to refuse gifts, despite an obvious need, simply to avoid the troubles that would ensue from their having an object that would distinguish them from their equals.

Perhaps a more common conflict of this sort, and one frequently misunderstood by Europeans, takes place in the context of the European-style school system in which the Malagasy participate (to a greater or lesser extent depending on the remoteness of the village from the school). It frequently happens, for example, that pupils copy each other's homework. The European teacher interprets this as "cheating." But the Malagasy pupil understands it quite differently. He has simply generalized his village ethic to the classroom. The teacher is a *ray-aman-dreny* and the pupils are all equals as non-*ray-aman-dreny*. If one pupil has finished an assignment, it would be as unnatural not to share it with others as it would be not to share any other temporary possession in the village, such as your city cousin's clothing.

4.3 Noncommittalism, Avoidance of Affront, and the Concept of *Henatra*

Another very important concept in understanding Malagasy social behavior is that of *henatra*, a root noun that translates as "shame." The predicate adjective formed from it is *menatra*, better translated as "be shamed" rather than merely "be ashamed," and the commonly heard causative form is *mahamenatra* "to cause shame." (The causative prefix before adjectives is *maha-* rather than *mamp-*, which is used before

verbs.) One of the most commonly heard injunctions against a particular behavior in a Malagasy community is *mahamenatra izany* "That causes shame" or "That is shameful."

We shall consider here two types of activity that Malagasy easily recognize as causing shame. The first of these is overt committal to some future good. Actually this almost never happens. To commit oneself to a future good, overtly, and then have the future course of events turn out otherwise would cause excruciating shame. For example, a village Malagasy does not normally prepare for the birth of a child. Since it is common for children to die during birth, a prospective mother who bought baby clothes in anticipation of the birth runs the risk of bringing great *henatra* to all concerned. We once bought some baby clothes for the anticipated birth of a child of a friend of ours but had at least the sense not to give them to her beforehand. Unfortunately the baby died at birth, and our sadness was indeed heavily mixed with *henatra*.

The principle of noncommittalism to future goods extends as well to many European-introduced activities. One would, for example, never pay for work in advance. If the contractor fled before completing the work, one would be caught red-handed and red-faced. A personal example: on first arriving in Madagascar we set up a bank account and deposited some checks we had. On leaving the bank we realized that we had no receipt for our deposit and had a moment of panic. Suppose they "lost" the money. Had we deposited cash, we would have received a receipt. But since we deposited checks, the Malagasy bank had to wait until they cleared before they could be sure they actually had the money. Giving us a receipt would have, psychologically at least, committed them to the existence of our dollars before they had them.

The mentality of 'noncommittalism to future goods' leads to the tendency to leap to the worst possible conclusion—for this protects one from being deceived through hoping that any good might be forthcoming. Once, for example, while talking with some neighbors outside their house, we were startled by a sudden crash from the area where the rabbits were kept. Before we had recovered from the loud noise, the lady of the house blurted out, "The rabbits are all dead!" And indeed the correct interpretation of the noise turned out to be that a side of the rabbit pen had fallen over. But that the crash would kill any of the rabbits was unlikely and that it would kill all of them was absurd. Still, just to be on the safe side, our neighbor assumed the worst possible outcome.

Another example: on returning to the village one evening after a heavier than usual afternoon rain we were informed that a certain *ray-aman-dreny*'s dikes had collapsed and that his rice crop was *entirely ruined*. That night we pondered the catastrophe and wondered if there was some way we could help out. The next morning we went to

Let us consider some other typical situations in which the free information norm of Western society is not followed, leading to incorrect inferences on the part of the European in a Malagasy context.

A European enters a village where he is well known and asks some women in the courtyard for one of his friends. (If the European were not known, it is unlikely he would find anyone to talk with for no one would accept the responsibility for having introduced an unknown power into the village life. Maybe the man is a tax collector. Or maybe he has come to steal some hearts—it is widely believed that white men need blood and kill little children to take their hearts.) The women respond *Asa* (a single particle meaning “I don’t know”). Then after some discussion the wife of the friend appears on the scene and says that the friend isn’t there. You say you wonder when he’ll return, to which she responds, “Well, if you don’t come after dinner you won’t catch him.”

This use of a double negative would be interpreted as uncooperative in Western society. One might think the wife perhaps is being coy, but certainly is not giving as much information as she could. But, in fact, the wife is not being coy or uncooperative. She is merely adhering to the norm of noncommittalism. The more natural response here for a European would be, “He’ll be here after dinner” or at least, depending on the knowledge of the speaker, “I expect him here after dinner.” But such claims of course, commit the speaker to a future course of action. The weaker claim, “If you don’t come after dinner, you won’t catch him” does not commit the speaker to the claim that if you do come after dinner you will catch him. It merely rules out one case where your action of coming would be in vain and leaves the rest open. If you show up after dinner and he isn’t there, you have no grounds for feeling that you had been given incorrect information. The wife can say in good conscience “He still hasn’t returned.”

A family has been preparing for the marriage of their daughter for the past six months—negotiating with the boy’s family, securing commitments for work and money from his extended family, registering the marriage in the local town government, making provisions for the ceremony, etc. It seems generally agreed that the marriage will probably take place on Thursday. On Tuesday you stop to inquire of the head of the family when the wedding will take place since you are to be one of the guests of honor and don’t want to plan anything that would conflict with the wedding. His response is merely “Oh, pretty soon now.” If you press him on the point by asking “Will it be on Thursday?”—which would be really gauche of you as this violates the nonconfrontation norm—he would likely respond with something like “Ah, Thursday, that would be a good day, we’ll see, we’ll see.”

Again the Malagasy is not being uncooperative here. He is behaving in a natural way, and it would be most unnatural to commit himself to a

particular date in advance. Imagine the shame if, at the last minute, something did happen.

On returning to your village late one night, one of the *ray-aman-dreny* appears at your door. (It is most unusual to visit after dark, so you know something is up.) And you ask him, “What’s new?” (*Inona no vaovao?*) to which he responds *Tsy misy* “Nothing” (lit.: “Not exist”). Then after some inconsequential discussion, it emerges that your neighbor who was expecting has had an unsuccessful labor, the child died, and the woman is in the town hospital. (For a country Malagasy, hospitals are generally regarded as places where you go to die, for they only take people to a hospital as a last resort.)

However, the response “Nothing” to your original question was the only reasonable answer for the Malagasy to give. To come out directly with new, and unpleasant, information would violate convention and put the giver on the spot.

You are taking some friends by car to a distant village. You come to a fork in the road and ask whether or not you go left there. The response is *Eny tompoko* “Yes, sir.” As you start to bear left you hear a mildly excited cry *Eo avaratra eo, angamba* “There to the north perhaps.” So you bear right.

Why did the Malagasy originally answer “yes” when asked about turning left? Because he doesn’t have available, at least without reflection, the concepts of left and right. All directions are given in terms of the cardinal points. Even within a house if I want to ask you for something within easy reach of your left hand, I will still indicate the object as “the tobacco there to the East.” But given that the Malagasy did not comprehend the term left, why did he still agree? Because agreement indicated social solidarity with the speaker. Disagreement would have been a confrontation and saying simply that he hadn’t understood might have implied that you hadn’t spoken appropriately. Normally when people perceive that there is a lack of understanding, they continue talking on the same topic until there is at least minimal communication. What was very awkward in the above situation was that a decision had to be reached quickly. There simply was no time to beat around the bush until the sentiments of your partner were clear.

Note as well that giving directions in terms of cardinal points rather than left and right serves to keep the speaker away from the center of attention. In general to reference objects and (as we shall see) people through oneself would draw attention to oneself, single oneself out from others, and would not then be a normal Malagasy behavior pattern.

Lastly then let us consider the ways human beings are referenced in everyday discourse.

relative to the expectation that information will ordinarily be given freely. Thus if we perceive that someone is avoiding our questions or being intentionally vague, we then assume that either he doesn't have the information we need or that one or more of the special circumstances applies.

In Malagasy society, on the other hand, the basic norm concerning free exchange of information simply does not apply, so inferences Westerners would make concerning the absence of information in special circumstances are generally incorrect. Imagine the following situation in Western society: A neighbor of yours sees you and your son walking up the street by your house and asks "Hey, Ed. Where're ya goin' so early?" And you answer, "Hi, just up to the hardware store. Gotta get some nails. We're building a treehouse."

It is safe to say that such an exchange would almost never occur among native rural Malagasy. Although it might be hard for the reader to appreciate, it would be totally bizarre for a Malagasy to volunteer all that information about the hardware store, the nails, building a treehouse, etc. A far more typical dialogue, when meeting a friend on a road or a path would be:

- | | |
|--|---|
| -Manao akory rangahy? | -How is it going, friend? |
| -Tsara ihany tompoko, ka manao ahaona ny vady-aman-janaka? | -Just fine sir, and how is the family? |
| -Tsara ihany fa misaotra, ka ho aiza moa? | -Just fine, thanks. Where are you headed? |
| -Atsy avaraparatra atsy tompoko. Ka ianareo moa, ho aiza? | -Just there a little to the North there. And where are you going? |
| -Izahay koa, dia mitsangan-tsangana ihany. | -We also, we're just out for a little walk. |
| -Eny ary, ka mandra-pihaona aloha. | -OK then, so long (lit.: until meeting). |
| -Eny, tain'Andriamanitra e. | -OK, may care be taken by God. |

In the Malagasy dialogue, no real information was given. Even the fact that one person was going to the North contains nothing that is not obvious from context, for Malagasay always reckon position by the cardinal points (North, South, East, and West); and directions of roads, positioning of villages, etc. are known to a local Malagasy with the same ease as right and left are known to a Westerner. Notice also that the word for North is actually *avaratra*. The form *avaraparatra* is a redup-

plicated form. Reduplication, especially of verbs and adjectives, is very common in Malagasy and has the effect of attenuating in appropriate ways the meaning of the unreduplicated form. Thus to have answered *atsy avaratra atsy*, without reduplication, would have been slightly more specific. The reduplicated form of 'North' indicates that the person is going perhaps in a somewhat less northward direction than does the unreduplicated form. Notice as well that the verb *mitsangana* "to stroll" is also reduplicated in the dialogue as *mitsangantsangana* and means "to walk around a little." Otherwise the dialogue's greetings and closing are largely ritualized formulas. Performance of these greetings and closings is important in acknowledging your social relations. Different greetings are appropriate for different social classes of people. Failure to greet someone or to use the right greeting would indicate a break in social relations. But these social relations are always known to members of a community, so using the appropriate terms does not, once again, communicate new information, it just reaffirms known status relations.

But note that in the situation depicted above, while the Malagasy does not expect an informative answer to the question "Where are you going?" he would love to have one. For this would give him some new information that he could then pass on, and as we indicated in section 4.1, possession of new information is possession of a scarce good allowing the possessor to command the attention of others. Of course, when we first established ourselves in the community we always gave informative answers to such questions, much to the enormous delight and advantage of those with whom we spoke.

Once, for example, as one of the authors (Edward) was leaving the village by car, having picked up a number of covillagers, a lady from the next village asked him how his wife was. He responded that she was just a little under the weather. This elicited the surprise exclamation *Kai!* (since it was an informative answer), which he misinterpreted as the weak conjunction *ka*... which would have asked for a continuation of the discourse (like saying "and..." expectantly, with a rising intonation). So he continued by supplying more information, "She'll go to the spring and wash out some clothes later." This, of course, elicited an even stronger *Kai!* reaction, which again misinterpreted, prompted still further information, and so on. Finally it was necessary to cease giving further information, as Edward couldn't think of anything further to say. And much later, reflecting on this interchange, we realized that it must have had an almost surrealistic quality for the Malagasy who were listening—each surprise reaction eliciting even more intensely the very act that prompted the surprise reaction in the first place. It would be a bit as though scratching a little itch behind your ear served to intensify the itch, thus prompting more scratching, then more itching, and so on. What began as a trivial piece of everyday conversation turned into a grotesque parody.

"be washed (by you) the clothes." The verb is passive in form, so attention is focused on the clothes and not the agent of the action (who is, of course, the addressee). Similarly if we want to say "Wash the clothes with this soap," it would be natural to form an imperative from the circumstantial form of the verb, making the instrument, the soap, the superficial subject. Thus *Anasao (-nao) ny lamba ity savony ity* "be washed by you the clothes this soap," or in more natural English "This soap is to be used by you to wash the clothes." Malagasy is in fact one of the relatively few languages in the world that has a well-developed system for forming nonactive imperatives. In English, for example, we simply could not say "be washed (by you) these clothes." The closest we get is "Let the clothes be washed (by you)," a construction archaic and elevated in tone that is not used freely.

Requests as well are often an occasion of considerable frustration on the part of the European in a Malagasy context. Needless to say by now, they are not given directly, for this would put the requestee on the spot and risk an affront to the requester if the request is denied. A normal request, even a fairly urgent one, usually takes place in stages. The requester approaches the requestee and engages him in conversation. Then he brings up the topic his request concerns but does not overtly make the request. The requestee is then free to ignore the topic and move to something else if he would prefer to not satisfy the request. He never has to confront the requester with a denial; he need not recognize the speech act as a request at all. Of course, the requester may persist and continually reintroduce a topic that concerns his needs, but if he is repeatedly ignored, he can still leave without feeling rejected, and hence shamed.

Once, for example, a group of boys, all known to us, came for an impromptu visit. We talked for perhaps twenty minutes, and finally the topic of a cut foot was brought up. Eventually one of the boys in the back of the group came forward and exhibited a severely bleeding foot. (Cut feet are common in this formerly volcanic area.) In this case not only was delaying the request normal but so was the arrival in the group. It would have been much more self-centered to arrive alone.

In fact, it is quite usual for a request to be made by someone other than the one who desires the service or object. For example, in the situation above, it was not the injured boy who directed our attention to the bleeding foot. It was his peer group that performed this act on his behalf. Such a procedure is so commonplace that even very young children are able to engage in this kind of interaction. Four-year-olds, for example, would frequently ask for a sweet for their younger siblings (and we were obliged, of course, to offer something to the older sibling as well).

Requests then are indirect in two ways: They are not made explicitly, and they are often made by a third party on someone else's behalf.

Recall in this connection the *mpikabary* in the formal speech situations who speaks for, or on behalf of, the entire family, including the ancestors. It is important to realize here that our characterization of the Malagasy request as indirect is ethnocentric on our part. What that means is indirect relative to our norms. But for the Malagasy, performing an 'indirect' request is simply to request. To force the behavior to be direct would make it into a social act with very different consequences. The 'indirectness' of Malagasy requests follows from the more general and pervasive norms of group, not individual, responsibility and nonconfrontation.

Thus, even in stress situations in which it is vital to have an answer to a request, it would not normally be possible to force a fully direct request. For example, towards the end of our stay in Madagascar a young man who we knew from the mission school in town but who lived in a village we did not know, arrived at our house with a very large sack of potatoes. It was rather obviously a gift for us, and one beyond the means of an ordinary household to offer. So we knew the boy must have come as a representative of a larger group, perhaps his entire village. And indeed, after having some tea together and chitchatting for perhaps a half an hour he began to approach the purpose of his visit, which was in essence that his village would consider it an honor for us to pay them a visit. And he was obviously commissioned to make the request since he was the only one from the village who knew us. He was further acutely embarrassed at being the sole representative to act on his village's behalf. We, however, had no desire to visit any new villages at that point in our stay so we continually skirted the topic of the visit in good Malagasy fashion. Had this been simply a casual request the hour's conversation with no committal on our part would have sufficed to discourage any further discussion of the matter. However, the boy was on the spot, obviously having to return to the village without his important gift and needing something to tell them in exchange. Finally, exasperated after an entire morning's conversation, he walked determinedly to our window and said, "There's the path (to the village) sir, there's the path." This was as close as he could bring himself to making a direct request. But we, of course, were still free to acknowledge that we indeed saw the path and knew where it went without having to acknowledge his request that we actually visit the village.

In general, request behavior in Madagascar is often misinterpreted by Europeans. A European's request often seems like a confrontation to the Malagasy and this engenders their hostility and lack of cooperation. And the Malagasy's request to the European often appears 'devious', perhaps even dishonest. Yet the Malagasy behavior here might be better termed considerate. Not only is asking a favor done indirectly, but so also is bestowing a favor. Thus a Malagasy may return a kindness by bringing a small gift of some sort. Offering a chicken, for example, is a

A teenage boy from a few houses away pays you an informal visit. After a little discussion he mentions that "Bosy's mother is a little sick". Further discussion yields that he would like to take her some medicine, which you provide and he leaves.

But you are puzzled, since you had thought that he and Bosy were siblings. But had they been he surely would have referred to Bosy's mother as "my mother" or perhaps *Ravelo* (her name). So you infer that perhaps he and Bosy are not really blood siblings, perhaps she is some neighbor's daughter who is only living with the other family.

Your inference, however, would be incorrect. The woman in question was in fact the boy's mother. He didn't refer to her as *his* mother, though, as that would be to reference someone through himself, thus in a small way making himself the center of attention. Neither did he refer to her by her proper name, for that would be too direct a way to identify her and would draw attention to her. Rather he chose, quite naturally in the Malagasy context, to specify her identity through a third party. And even the third party is not, as might appear, unequivocally identified, for *Bosy* is a very common, almost generic, name used to refer to young girls. That is, even if a young girl's name is not *Bosy* I might refer to her as such in a context in which the reference is otherwise reasonably clear. Note further that to reference his mother as a parent of someone is respectful, since, as we have seen, having children places you in the *ray-aman-dreny* class. By contrast, to have referenced his mother as the spouse of X would not have had this slight advantage, although it would have preserved the general respect inherent in referencing someone through one's family affiliation.

Besides referencing through third parties, a great many other linguistic means are available for personal reference. Agent nouns are commonly used. Thus on a particular occasion a boy might be referred to as a *mpiandry omby* "cow watcher" (from the verb *miandry* "to watch, guard" and *omby* "cow"). Such names of course, are particularly adaptable to the activity that the person to whom you are referring happens to be performing at the time of reference. Similarly, most predicates, adjectives, adverbs, and demonstratives may be combined with *ny* "the" to form a referential phrase. Thus *ny omaly* "the yesterday" could easily be used to refer to "the person who was here yesterday" and *ny mbola tsy tonga* "the still not come" to those who hadn't yet arrived.

Further, existential constructions with no noun phrases often fulfill functions for which we use noun phrases in English. A simple example of an existential construction would be *misy mitomany* "exist cry," meaning "there is crying going on" or more naturally "someone is crying." (Both *misy* "exist" and *mitomany* "cry" are ordinary verbs. Existential constructions always begin with *misy* and are frequently

followed by another verb.) However, suppose a brother of yours, well known to the village, comes looking for you. Someone who is coming to seek you out would most likely merely report *misy mitady* "exist looking for." There would be no need to say "exist looking for you" since the reference is clear from context, but neither is there mention of who is doing the looking.

In middle-class European or American society if someone who knew your brother well reported to you merely, "Someone was looking for you," you would be surprised to learn that the person was your brother and would likely infer that the person who reported the information did not have it firsthand and hence didn't actually know who was looking for you. But again, this would be an incorrect inference in the Malagasy situation.

5.2 Orders and Requests

The final case we shall consider concerns several linguistic aspects of ordering and requesting. Obviously giving someone an order is a confrontation experience, so when such is necessary we might expect the Malagasy to have recourse to means for "softening the blow." Such is in fact the case.

In English we give an order in the active voice, most usually omitting the addressee phrase "you." Thus we say "Wash those clothes": the verb "wash" is active (the passive would be "be washed [by]"). If the addressee phrase is present, it occurs as the subject and gives special emphasis as in "You wash those clothes right now!" When present, the subject phrase is the most prominent member of the sentence.

In Malagasy it is possible to form active imperatives by using the active form of the verb with the stress shifted to the right. Thus corresponding to "You are washing the clothes" *mánasa ny lamba ianao* (with stress marked on the first syllable of *manasa*), we have "(you) wash the clothes" *manasá lamba (ianao)*, where the addressee phrase *ianao* is usually omitted as in English but may occur for emphatic effect. But an active order in Malagasy is considered a highly brusque statement and a confrontation. It is used only in situations of stress or anger, and Europeans who frequently use active imperatives in Malagasy are often misinterpreted as being much more aggressive and authoritarian than they intend to be.

The normal form for an order is to put the verb in something other than the active voice, making the patient of the action or some circumstance of the action the subject phrase and hence the item on which attention is focused. The addressee phrase, again usually omitted, would occur as a passive agent or circumstantial agent if present. Thus the normal way to say "Wash the clothes" would be *Sasao (-nao) ny lamba*

highly valued way to express your appreciation to someone. Imagine, for example, a group of women arriving at your house, one of them with a chicken clucking and squirming under her *lamba*. You couldn't possibly remark upon the fact, or acknowledge the gift, until after much pleasant talk, serving tea, etc. Then finally one of the women would uncover the chicken and you would go through a reaction of surprise and appreciation.

Finally, regarding request behavior, the European may often find himself as having been understood to have made a request where in fact none was intended. For example, on one occasion, Edward, in making idle conversation with a neighbor, happened to remark on the large pile of sweet potatoes in front of the man's house. About twenty minutes later, having returned to our own house, we were surprised to see the man's son appear with a plate of two cooked sweet potatoes! On reflection, it was clear that our casual remark was interpreted as a request by our neighbor. So in adapting to this Malagasy norm, one must learn to both listen more attentively and to understate (by European standards) one's intentions.

5.3 Norms and Mitigating Circumstances

It would be incorrect to infer from our descriptions of Malagasy social behavior that the Malagasy are always uninformative, self-effacing, or that they never have confrontations. In the same way that in American society the norm of free exchange of information can be mitigated by other norms, like those of respecting the confidentiality relations between lawyer and client, priest and confessee, etc., so also we find that the Malagasy norms we have discussed may be mitigated in various ways. We have already seen, for example, that the norm of nonconfrontation applies less to women than to men.

Other general factors as well condition the application of these norms. Thus the directness of a request will vary with the magnitude of the request and the social relations that exist between the requester and the requestee. If the request is of small magnitude, as for a piece of tobacco, it is more likely to be made, all other things being equal, in a reasonably direct way. But if the request is major, as for a bride or for sizable assistance in a bone-turning ceremony, the request will certainly be indirect. Similarly, if the two parties are *havana* (a term that covers kinsmen and close acquaintances) the request is more likely to be direct. But if one of the parties is *vahiny* (outsider, stranger, foreigner), the request is almost certain to be indirect. If one of the parties is *vahiny* and the request is minor, or if the request is major and the parties are *havana*, the degree of directness will be adjusted to suit the particular circumstances, though always falling on the indirect side by European standards.

It is important to recognize the conditioning factors on speech

norms, since the quality of observation a visitor, say a field worker, can make will be conditioned by the role he occupies in the local social structure. Had we, for example, merely lived in a town and visited different villages, we would never have been on a *havana* basis with anyone. We might easily then have mistaken the norms for interaction with *vahiny* as being the norms for everyone. Nor would we have observed the differential applications of the norms with respect to men and women, since most interactions between outsiders and a village are mediated by the men of the village. The nonconfrontation norm applies less to women than to men, but on a daily basis women interact mostly with their immediate family, their children, or other women. Only men formally represent the family or the village to others, thus only men perform the major *kabary* at marriages or bone-turning ceremonies.

It was important then for the quality of observation that we live in a village and become *havana* rather than remaining *vahiny*. This not only enabled us to observe the variable application of speech norms, it actually enabled us to observe elementary syntactic facts about the language that otherwise we would not have been in a position to note. Thus, in addition to the standard address terms (*ianao* "you" [sg] and *ianareo* "you" [pl]), we found that there were many other second-person address terms whose usage was socially very restricted. For example, *ise* is used only to address people with whom one is on very close terms. The restrictions are much more severe, for example, than the use of familiar address terms in European languages. It would be highly unusual for a Malagasy and a European to use this form between them. And other pronominal forms are even more highly restricted. Thus *indroky* is largely restricted in usage to a mother talking to her child. It would never be used between a Malagasy and a European. Most grammars of Malagasy don't even mention the restricted pronouns.

In general then, an alert field worker must be able to assess how those in the situation he is observing place him in their social structure. Only then can he judge what distortion his very presence introduces into the range of phenomena he will be trying to observe and understand.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

Malagasy Grammar

Cousins, W.E. *A Concise Introduction to the Study of the Malagasy Language*. London: Antananarivo Press of the London Missionary Society, 1894.

A concise but excellent traditional grammar.

Malzac, R.P. *Grammaire Malgache*. Paris: Société D'éditions Géographiques, Maritimes et Coloniales, 1926.

Longer and more thorough than Cousins but no more insightful.

