

# THETICITY IN TIRIYÓ: An Empirical Reevaluation

by

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A THESIS

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and the Robert D. Clark Honors College  
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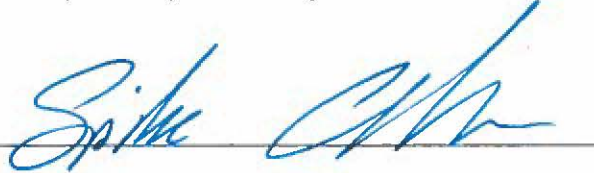
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## An Abstract of the Thesis of

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Spike Gildea, Ph.D., Linguistics

My thesis explores the concept of theticity, both in general and in a specific language: Tiriyó. This language is a member of the Cariban language family and its speakers live in Suriname and Brazil. Theticity is a type of utterance that allows a speaker to present all of the information in a clause as a single information structure unit with the value of “non-presupposed”. This theoretical definition of theticity is widely agreed upon in the subfield. However, it is not clear how you take this definition of theticity and use it to find thetic utterances in your own language of study. What is missing is an operational definition.

This thesis analyzes a research article by Eithne Carlin about a proposed thetic construction in Tiriyó: the *t-V-se* construction. In particular, I analyze Carlin’s research methodology to discover how she acquired evidence to support her claim that the *t-V-se* construction is the thetic construction in Tiriyó. I found that she did not provide an operational definition of theticity in her article, which prompted me to reevaluate theticity in Tiriyó with my own operational definition. I found that the *t-V-se* construction can code theticity, however it is not the only clause type that can do so, and it has several other functions. Ultimately, I found that without an operational definition, there is no reliable way to find evidence to support a scientific claim.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank Professors Gildea and Payne for helping me to fully examine theticity and consider the various perspectives and contexts related to this subject matter. Additionally, I would like to thank Professor Fracchia, for agreeing to be my Honors College representative and helping me make my thesis more accessible to general audiences. I feel truly privileged to have been able to work with such excellent professors, whose guidance made this challenging endeavor the most rewarding aspect of my college experience. I would also like to thank my mother, Anne Johnson, for supporting me throughout college and helping me through every aspect of the past four years. Thank you, Mom, for listening to every breakdown and celebrating every accomplishment in my life. I know you will always stand by me and that gives me the strength I need to know that I can accomplish anything I set my mind to. Aaron, thank you for lending me your strength when I had none, and your sanity when I felt like nothing made sense.

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## List of Abbreviations

<b>1:</b> First Person Non-Collective	<b>Ineff:</b> Inefficient
<b>2:</b> Second Person Non-Collective	<b>Intens:</b> Intensifier
<b>3:</b> Third Person Non-Collective	<b>Inst:</b> Instrumental
<b>3InAna:</b> Third Person Inanimate Anaphoric	<b>Loc:</b> Locative
<b>3InMd:</b> Third Person Inanimate Medial	<b>NCERT:</b> Noncertainty
<b>InPx:</b> Third Person Inanimate Proximal	<b>Neg:</b> Negation; Negative
<b>A.pot.Azr:</b> Adverbializer	<b>NF:</b> Nonfinite
<b>Agt:</b> A participant ('Agent') marker	<b>NR.PST:</b> Nonrecent Past
<b>Attn:</b> Attention	<b>Nzr:</b> Nominalizer
<b>AUG:</b> Augmentative	<b>O:</b> O participant; O-marking
<b>Cess:</b> Cessative	<b>OBL:</b> Oblique
<b>CERT:</b> Certainty	<b>PRES:</b> Present
<b>Circ.Nzr:</b> Circumstance Nominalizer	<b>PRS:</b> Presentational
<b>COM:</b> Comitative	<b>PRO:</b> Pronoun
<b>Cont:</b> Continuative	<b>PST/Pst:</b> Past
<b>Cop:</b> Copula	<b>Pos:</b> Possession suffix; Possessed form
<b>DEM:</b> Demonstrative	<b>Post:</b> Posteriority
<b>Detr:</b> Detrasitivizer	<b>Rm.Pst:</b> Remote Past
<b>Dim:</b> Diminutive	<b>Rpt:</b> Repetition
<b>DIR:</b> Directional	<b>S<sub>A</sub>:</b> S <sub>A</sub> Participant; S <sub>A</sub> class marker
<b>DU:</b> Dual	<b>S<sub>O</sub>:</b> S <sub>O</sub> Participant
<b>E.RD:</b> External Reduplication	<b>SG:</b> Singular
<b>IMP:</b> Imperative	<b>Tmp:</b> Tempora
<b>INCL:</b> Inclusive	

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## 1. Introduction

When beginning my research for this thesis I was, in a lot of ways, similar to the average person who had never studied linguistics. I really had no idea what theticity was. I had heard about it very briefly in a syntax class, but did not really remember what was said about it. However, I do remember my syntax-professor-turned-advisor, Spike Gildea, saying that it was a field that required a lot more research. He mentioned a recently published article on theticity that he did not particularly agree with. This turned out to be Eithne Carlin's article, *Theticity in Trio (Cariban)*, which became the subject of my thesis, but more on that later. My main advantage over someone who had never studied linguistics is that I knew linguistic concepts and terminology, which allowed me to understand and analyze the existing research on theticity.

To start my research, I first had to figure out what theticity was. In its most basic sense, a thetic utterance is one where you have to accept all aspects of the utterance as a single information structure unit, which in its entirety is non-presupposed. This means you have to either completely agree with the utterance, or completely disagree with it. This concept is fairly new in comparison to the Aristotelian bipartite clause type, which is the traditional clause type that Aristotle identified almost 2,500 years ago. Theticity as an idea, which came before its application to linguistics research, has only been around for the last 100 years, and it has only been used in Linguistics since 1986. I give a more detailed definition of theticity, along with examples, in Section 2.

After determining what theticity was, I turned to Carlin's article about theticity as it exists in Tiriyo. Tiriyo is a Cariban language that is spoken in the South American countries Brazil and Suriname. Carlin's article focuses on one particular clause type



called the *t-V-se* construction. This construction is a remote past tense that looks a lot like the passive voice in English (1). For the Tiriyó example (2) think of the English translation as “The village was attacked by the Bushnegroes.” This translation more closely approximates the Tiriyó word order.

(1) The man was bitten by the dog.

(2) *pata*      *tìhkèrènmae*      *meekoro\_ja.*<sup>1</sup>  
*pata*      *tì-hkèrènma-se*      *meekoro\_:ja*  
village    Rm.Pst-attack-Rm.Pst    Bushnegro\_Agt  
‘the Bushnegroes attacked (= afflicted) the village.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 628)

In both the English and Tiriyó clauses, the Patient, which is the participant of the sentence that is being acted upon, looks like the subject. In (1) the Patient is *The man*, and in (2), the Patient is *pata* or ‘village’. Both clause types also have a verb that is in its participle form, meaning that it does not agree with any of the participants of the sentence (*bitten* and *tìhkèrènmae*). Like the English passive, the *t-V-se* clause type may include the verb ‘to be’, functioning as an auxiliary. However, example (2) does not include this feature. This construction also codes for something called non-witnessed evidentiality, which simply means that the speaker did not witness the event being talked about, but learned about in some other way.

After learning about Tiriyó and the *t-V-se* construction, I turned to Carlin’s argument that this construction is thethetic construction. This is where I began to disagree with Carlin’s article. My main problem with it is that she did not tell me how

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<sup>1</sup> To read examples in a language you are unfamiliar with, first start with the English translation on the bottom line. Then, look at the line immediately above the English translation. This will show how the English words align with the words of the original language. This line will also tell you other important information contained in the clause (often in the form of prefixes and suffixes). This extra information is indicated with abbreviations, a full list of which can be found on page (vi).

she identified thetic utterances in Tiriyo. This means that I could not go and look at a story in Tiriyo and find thetic utterances for myself. I go more into detail about the contents of Carlin's article and my objections to it in Section 3.

After determining that I disagreed both with Carlin's methodology and her conclusions, I decided to research Tiriyo and the *t-V-se* construction for myself. I analyzed the five Tiriyo texts appended to Sergio Meira's (1999) *A Grammar of Tiriyo*. After performing several tests on these stories, which I detail in Section 4, I have concluded that coding theticity is not the primary function of the *t-V-se* construction. The functions of this construction have more to do with storytelling. Furthermore, I argue that the nature of theticity is such that it can occur in many different clause types within an individual language. This means that, while the *t-V-se* construction can code for theticity, it is not the only construction to do so.

## 2. What is Theticity?

Theticity is a concept that did not originate in the field of linguistics. It was first introduced in philosophy by Franz Brentano and Anton Marty as an alternative to traditional Aristotelian bipartite reasoning. Aristotelian bipartite reasoning is a type of logical judgment with a subject-predicate structure; it is often referred to as a categorical structure. Its thetic counterpart is a “logically unstructured, or unary, statement that posited a state of affairs as a whole” (Carlin, 2011, p. 16). Theticity was not applied to linguistics until Hans-Jürgen Sasse introduced the idea in 1987. He argues that a thetic construction occurs when “a new situation is presented as a whole” (Sasse, 2006, p. 256). This means that all parts of the situation must be accepted or rejected as a singular entity. In many languages, sentences about the weather appear in the thetic form. For example, in English, “It’s raining” is a thetic utterance because all parts of the sentence have to be true or false. Contrastively, “Steven threw the ball” is not a thetic utterance, but rather a categorical construction, because all aspects of the sentence can be accepted or rejected individually. Perhaps Steven bounced the ball, instead of threw it; or maybe Jessica threw the ball, instead of Steven; it could even be the case that Steven threw the Frisbee and it was not a ball at all. Once again, all aspects of a thetic utterance must be accepted or rejected as a group, making “She is tall” typically thetic, but “John went to the store” potentially categorical.

There seems to be a general consensus in the field of linguistics regarding this theoretical definition of theticity (Carlin, 2011; Sasse, 1987; Sasse, 2006; Schultze-Berndt & van der Wal, 2013). This type of utterance is sometimes referred to as an “all-new” or “out of the blue” construction; because these are situations that frequently have

a thetic value (Sasse, 2006; Schultze-Berndt & van der Wal, 2013). In a thetic utterance, the event as a whole is the central focus and arguments or participants around the verb are attributes of the verb (Carlin, 2011); it is characterized by the “absence of a topic-comment relation between the subject and the predicate” (Lambrecht, 2000, p. 611). Another term for the same phenomenon is sentence focus. This term was introduced by Knud Lambrecht, and was so-named because no singular aspect of a thetic utterance is in focus; therefore it can be said that the entire sentence is in focus. While Lambrecht does not claim that the concept of sentence focus is identical to theticity, he argues that they are mostly similar (Carlin, 2011, p. 17) and some current linguists, such as Eva Schultze-Berndt (2008, p. 5) and Jenneke van der Wal (2008, p. 3) use the two terms interchangeably. However Carlin (2011, p. 13) disagrees and maintains that the two terms reference separate concepts. For the purposes of this paper I will use the term theticity, as it is, by far, the more commonly used term.

A range of grammar marks the thetic function across languages. For the purposes of this thesis I will define grammar as morphology and syntax. I will not be including intonation or stress as an aspect of grammar as these are suprasegmental and cannot always be identified in text. As explained by Schultze-Berndt & van der Wal (2013), there is no singular, universal grammatical construction that encodes theticity. Theticity is only identifiable based on function because the grammar that codes it is variable both across and within languages. In languages like Italian and Spanish, theticity is coded with word order inversion (4), where the predicate precedes the subject. Lambrecht (1994, p. 233) gives an example where you are a passenger on a bus. You are frustrated because the bus is being held up by a woman overladen with

grocery bags. She looks apologetically at everyone on the bus and says *My CAR broke down* (4). In this context, her utterance is completely out of the blue. Nothing that she tells us is presupposed information, because we have no reason to know that the woman owns a car, or that that car is broken. It is the context, in combination with the inverted grammar, that makes example (4) athetic utterance.

(3) *La macchina si è ROTTA*  
'The CAR broke DOWN'

(4) *Mi si è rotta la MACCHINA*<sup>2</sup>  
'My CAR broke down'

(Sasse, 2006, p. 265)

In English, Dutch, and German, athetic utterance is coded by markedly stressing the subject (5), as opposed to the more typical declarative statement where the predicate receives the stress (6) (Sasse, 2006, p. 257).

(5) *Das TELEFON klingelt.*  
'The PHONE'S ringing.'

(6) *Das Telefon KLINGELT*  
'The phone's RINGING.'

(Sasse, 2006, p. 255-256)

Another important hypothesis in the study of theticity is that there is no dedicated grammar for thetic utterances in any one language, meaning that you cannot tell by looking at the grammar alone whether a sentence is thetic. In English, thetic and non-thetic utterances are differentiated with intonation. Let's take the phrase *The telephone is ringing*. Without identifying the inflection on any aspect of the utterance, this phrase could be thetic or categorical. For instance, if a friend asks *What's that sound?* you

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<sup>2</sup> All-caps represents stress or accent on an element of the sentence.

might reply *The telephone is ringing*. If we add stress to the participant, *the TELEPHONE is ringing*, it becomesthetic; however if we add stress to the predicate, *the telephone is RINGING*, it becomes categorical. In English, each and every sentence has some sort of stress and so it is the placement of that stress that is important when identifyingthetic utterances. A sentence like *the telephone is RINGING* would likely appear in a situation where the speaker wanted to correct someone. For example, your friend might ask *Is your telephone broken?* And you might respond *The telephone is RINGING*.

Another good example of the same grammar coding both categorical andthetic utterances comes from Eva Schultze-Berndt and Candide Simard’s (2012) work with the Australian language Jaminjung. Their research covers discontinuous noun phrases in Jaminjung, and they argue that most of the discontinuous NPs express one of two possible options (Schultze-Berndt & Simard, 2012, p. 1018). The first option is a subtype of contrastive argument focus, and the second is a subtype oftheticity, or sentence focus. Which of these options is being expressed in a particular utterance is decided with syntacto-pragmatic and prosodic evidence. The following examples argue that the same grammar can be used to make both categorical andthetic constructions. Example (7) shows a normal noun phrase, (8) a split noun phrase in a sentence coding athetic utterance, and (9) a split noun phrase in a sentence coding a non-thetic utterance.

- (7) [*thanthiya gujugu*] *ba-rriga mindag!*  
 DEM big IMP-cook 1DU.INCL.OBL  
 ‘Cook that big one for you and me!’ (referring to one of two fish just caught)  
 (Schultze-Berndt & Simard, 2012, p. 1020)

- (8) *jarndu ga-ram luba mangurn=mij!*  
 boat 3SG-come.PRS big white.person=COM  
 ‘There comes a big boat with white people!’  
 (Schultze-Berndt & Simard, 2012, p. 1041)
- (9) *^jirrama ganuny-ma-ya jarlig, gumurrinyji orait.*  
 two 3SG>3DU-have-PRS child emu all.right  
*^bardawurru gana-ma-ya \. . jarlig\*  
 many 3SG>3SG-have-PRS child  
 ‘She (the brologa) has two children. The emu, all right, she has many,  
children that is.’  
 (Schultze-Berndt & Simard, 2012, p. 1035)

Schultze-Berndt and Simard discover that what differentiates thethetic utterance in (8) from the categorical utterance in (9) is intonation, rather than grammar. This is a perfect example of how grammar alone cannot be used to identify theticity, because both categorical and thetic utterances are coded by the same grammar in this language. According to Sasse, “The language-specific investigations which proceed from the form<sup>3</sup> of utterances in single languages are not necessarily comparable from a functional point of view” (Sasse, 2006, p. 262). Theticity is potentially realized in each language differently. Because of this, some linguists doubt whether theticity can be empirically justified in discourse (Sasse, 2006, p. 260). Theticity is only identifiable based on function because grammar is variable both across and within languages. This leaves us with a very important question: How do you recognize a thetic utterance when you see one?

A theoretical definition explains what a concept is in a more abstract sense, while the means by which a researcher identifies an instance of a concept in its concrete form is an operational definition. The main problem surrounding theticity seems to be that there is no set operational definition of theticity. In linguistics, an operational

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<sup>3</sup> I understand ‘form’ to mean syntax and morphology in the context of Sasse’s research.

definition tells a linguist how they identify an example of a concept when they see it in a language. Operational definitions tend to be language specific, whereas theoretical definitions are more universal. Let's use an example from English by examining the concept of a noun. A noun's theoretical definition is that it names a person, place, thing or idea. It is the entity doing or affected by the action of the sentence, or the entity described. Now imagine that you are an alien that has just arrived on earth and you were given an English newspaper. Could you find a noun in the newspaper based on just that description? That would be impossible. If you doubt this example, then let's add on to it. While looking at that newspaper you see the word *walk*. Now quickly decide if it's a noun or a verb. Could you do that without more context? That would be highly unlikely as it could be either a noun or a verb, depending on the sentence it occurs in. This is why operational definitions are necessary. In English, linguists identify what is a noun mainly by grammar. An English noun takes a possessive ending: *The dog's bone*. It can be modified by placing an adjective immediately in front of it: *The red ball*. Nouns can occur with either the determiner *a* or *the*, as in *the book* or *a telephone*. Nouns are not always easy to identify in English because the same word form can be both a noun and a verb. As a Martian linguist, you would be confused by a word like *fight* because it could occur in a sentence like, *I want to fight you*, or it could occur as *The fight took place in the schoolyard*. This is where the operational definition is essential, because even though the word *fight* "means" pretty much the same thing in both sentences, you would look at the second sentence and see the determiner *the* attached to the word *fight* and see that here it takes the grammar of a noun. It is this huge difference between a



theoretical definition and an operational definition that has posed a problem in the subfield of thetic research.

When reading the majority of published articles focusing on theticity, I have gone through the exact same experience. The researcher opens with his or her theoretical definition; it's beautiful. As you read it you start thinking that this is an idea you could really get behind. It makes sense. You can see how it could apply to your own language of study and you start to get excited. You want to keep reading because you are really starting to believe that thetic constructions exist in language, and then, suddenly, there are examples from the text and you wonder how the researcher identified them as thetic. You feel let down because these linguists proceed directly into claims about theticity in their specific language of study without outlining how they (or you) can know a thetic utterance when you come across one. In other words, there is no operational definition. Instead of being convinced by facts and reasoned arguments, you are left to trust the judgment of the researcher. By forcing the reader to trust the judgment of the researcher, the article strays from hard science into the realm of pseudo-science. I call this the theoretical/operational leap. This can be witnessed in Kuroda, 1972; Sasse, 1987; Sasse, 1995; Sasse, 1996; Sasse, 2006; Rosengren, 1997; van der Wal, 2008; Schwarz, 2010; Carlin, 2011; and Mettouchi & Tosco, 2011, among others. With the number of studies, including recently published ones, that lack an operational definition, it seems clear that this issue is pervasive throughout the subfield. It seems that one of the main reasons for this leap is that grammar cannot be used as evidence to support whether a particular utterance is thetic or not in one or another particular language, as I described earlier.

Other linguists, however, seem to have successfully created a bridge between their theoretical and operational definitions. These linguists have more rigorous, or operationalized, approaches regarding how to identify thetic utterances in discourse. This topic was of such concern that in 2013, a group of linguists convened a themed session at the annual meeting of the Linguistics Association of Great Britain in an attempt to establish an operational definition for identifying theticity in discourse (cf. Schultze-Berndt & van der Wal, 2013). They put out a call for more papers on the topic, because the current research providing operational definitions of theticity was so limited. One researcher who provides an operational definition in his research is Tom Güldemann. He details his methods for identifying thetic constructions in discourse as follows:

The versatility of thetic sentences regarding salience relations in texts can also be discerned from the list of their typical contexts, as given by Sasse (1987) and repeated in Figure 4. It shows that some of the functions of thetic sentences are almost opposites of each other when viewed on the level of discourse, e.g., “surprising or unexpected event” vs. “background description”.

- (1) EXISTENTIAL STATEMENTS in a wider sense; presence, appearance, continuation, etc., positively and negatively)
- (2) EXPLANATIONS (with or without preceding questions such as ‘what happened?’ ‘why did it happen?’, etc.)
- (3) SURPRISING OR UNEXPECTED EVENTS
- (4) GENERAL STATEMENTS (aphorisms, etc.)
- (5) BACKGROUND DESCRIPTIONS (local, temporal, etc., setting)
- (6) WEATHER EXPRESSIONS
- (7) STATEMENTS RELATING TO BODY PARTS<sup>4</sup>

**Figure 4.** Diagnostic contexts for thetic statements (Sasse 1987: 566-7)

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<sup>4</sup> I do not necessarily agree with all of Güldemann’s criteria for identifying thetic utterances. The important thing here is that he actually has criteria.

With respect to the present topic, the list reveals that the cleft-like structures in Tuu languages which cannot be satisfactorily analyzed as marking contrastive term focus turn out to be functionally largely parallel tothetic sentences. I have identified in §3 three basic functions, (a) exclamations and utterances of surprise, (b) presentation of entities and setting at the beginning of narratives, and (c) background information for the main storyline. They all show up in Sasse's list in Figure 4 so that I propose to view these expressions as instances ofthetic sentences

(Güldemann, 2010, p. 87).

Güldemann created these criteria for identifyingthetic sentences because he was not able to come up with an explanation for the function of all cleft sentences in the Tuu language family. He looked at contrastive focus as an explanation; however that did not work for all the data, so he proposedtheticity as an additional function of cleft sentences because they were doing jobs (a-c) in the above quote. Another group of researchers who have dealt more clearly with the problem is Schultze-Berndt and Simard, whose 2012 study on *Jaminjung* was mentioned previously. Their operational definition was beautifully simple. They simply defined athetic utterance as an “out of the blue” or “all new” statement (Schultze-Berndt & Simard, 2012, p. 1041). There may be otherthetic subtypes in their data, but these two criteria were enough to explain the “funny” discontinuous noun phrases. The operational definition does not need to be complicated. It simply needs to allow a new researcher to go back to the language in the study and findthetic utterances for themselves.

Although a few linguists are careful to avoid the theoretical/operational leap, it seems clear that this leap has become embedded into the culture ofthetic research and analysis. Researchers have not been held accountable for justifying their manner of analysis in regards totheticity in discourse. Perhaps this is because the subfield oftheticity has yet to reach an agreed-upon operational definition ofthetic utterances in

discourse. Sasse (2006, p. 262) recognizes this issue and claims that any operational definition of theticity needs to handle the form-function problem and guarantee compatibility across languages. Creating such a definition is no easy task. This leaves researchers to grapple with producing their own individual operational definitions of theticity, which may be why they are often omitted from their publications. These definitions tend to be heavily dependent on intuition, that is, “I know one when I see one”. While intuition might work for a native speaker, it gets more difficult the farther removed your connection to the language. However, the inclusion of clear and replicable definitions could prove incredibly beneficial to the subfield’s community of researchers.

It was in this unstable, unregulated climate that Eithne Carlin published her 2011 article about theticity in Tiriyo. While I was first attracted to this article because I disagreed with Carlin’s conclusions, I realized that the theoretical/operational leap so prevalent throughout the subfield was the true root of my objection to Carlin’s conclusions/claims. Ultimately, my research regarding this article evolved in a way much different than I anticipated.

### 3. Theticity in Tiriyo According to Carlin (2011)

#### 3.1 Background

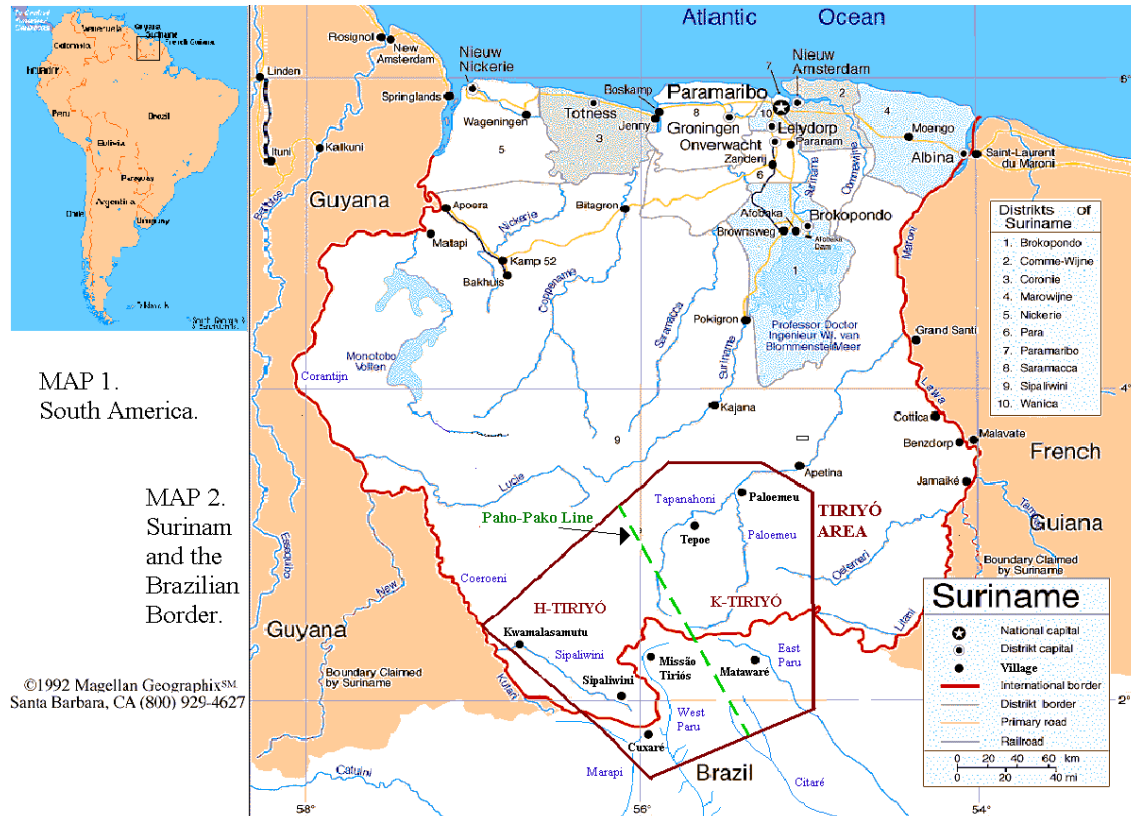


Figure 1: Map of Tiriyo Language Distribution

Tiriyo is a member of the Cariban language family, also called Trio, Trió, and Tirió. This language has approximately 2,130 speakers in Suriname, French Guiana, and Northeastern Brazil (Paul, 2014). Although most speakers are monolingual, increasingly speakers of Tiriyo also speak Dutch, Portuguese, or Sranantongo.<sup>5</sup> Eithne Carlin spent 12 years among the Tiriyo people in Suriname, where she collected a corpus of language data; she has written a reference grammar (Carlin, 2004), and several academic articles about the language. Other researchers who have studied and

<sup>5</sup> A lingua franca of Suriname

published on the Tiriyo language include Sérgio Meira, who also wrote a reference grammar (Meira, 1999) and multiple articles, and my advisor, Spike Gildea, who has included Tiriyo data in his book on comparative Cariban grammar (1998) and in several articles.

### **3.2 Article Summary**

In her 2011 article, Carlin proposes that there is a specific grammaticalized clause type in Tiriyo that encodes theticity. She argues that “Trio makes both a pragmatic and structural distinction between two kinds of clauses,” with these two types being thetic and categorical clauses (Carlin, 2011, p. 3). She also argues that there is a difference in non-witnessed and witnessed evidentiality in this language.

Before delving into the concept of theticity, Carlin gives a general typological overview of Tiriyo. She states that Tiriyo is an agglutinative language that employs mainly suffixes; however diathesis and person marking appear as prefixes. According to Carlin (2011, p. 3), “The order of meaningful elements in a clause is for the most part determined by pragmatic considerations in that new information tends to be found at the beginning of the clause; the default unmarked order is OVS.” In linguistics, OVS (or OVA as I refer to it) describes the word order of a transitive clause. The O is the object of the sentence, the V is the verb, and the S (or A) is the subject (or agent) of the sentence. In English, the word order is SVO (AVO). In the English sentence *Mary ate the apple*, *Mary* is the S (or A), *ate* is the V, and *the apple* is the O. Carlin goes on to mention that VS is the standard order for one-argument (intransitive) verbs.

After establishing these basic elements of the Tiriyo language, Carlin introduces the four basic clause types. These are nonverbal clauses (i.e. clauses which lack a verb

word), copula clauses (clauses with the verb ‘to be’), verbal clauses, and quotative clauses. However Carlin ignores quotative clauses and only further discusses the first three clause types.

One type of verbal clause is the *t-V-se* clause (11), which is a form that expresses the remote past tense. Carlin states that the *t-V-se* form has a high level of allomorphy, which means that it appears in many different surface forms (10):

Forms of the nonfinite suffix portion *-se*

*-se* with (reducing) verbs that drop their final syllable *pī*,

*tī*, *tē*, *kī*, *ku*, *ru*

*-je* with (reducing) verbs that replace the final syllable *mī* or *mu* with *n*

*-e* with nonreducing verbs (except those ending in *e*)

∅ with verbs ending in *e*

(Carlin, 2011, p. 9)

(10)	<i>-se</i>				
(a)	<b>ëëni(ki)</b>	‘sleep’ (S <sub>A</sub> )	→	<b>tī-w-ëëni-se</b>	‘slept’
(b)	<b>emoki</b>	‘move away’ (S <sub>A</sub> )’	→	<b>t-eemoo-se</b>	‘moved away’
	<i>-e</i>				
(c)	<b>ka</b>	‘say’ (S <sub>A</sub> )	→	<b>tīi-ka-e</b>	‘said’
(d)	<b>ihhtë</b>	‘go down’ (S <sub>A</sub> )	→	<b>tī-w-ihhtë-e</b>	‘went, gone down’
(e)	<b>oeka / weka</b>	‘defecate’ (S <sub>A</sub> )	→	<b>tī-weka-e</b>	‘defecated’
(f)	<b>enta</b>	‘wake up’ (S <sub>O</sub> )	→	<b>t-ënta-e</b>	‘woke up; awake’
	<i>-je</i>				
(g)	<b>ona(mi)</b>	‘hide O’	→	<b>t-onan-je</b>	‘hid; hidden’
(h)	<b>moi</b>	‘obey O’	→	<b>tī-moi-je</b>	‘obeyed’
(i)	<b>htëinkapa(mi)</b>	‘forget’ (S <sub>O</sub> )	→	<b>tī-htëinkapan-je</b>	‘forgot; forgotten’
	<i>-∅</i>				
(j)	<b>ëne</b>	‘see’	→	<b>t-ëne-∅</b>	‘saw’

(Meira, 1999, p. 333-334)

It is this allomorphy that makes (10) appear with *-e* instead of *-se*. She argues that the *t-V-se* form should receive a past tense reading even though there is no formal means to anchor the form in time, because there is no tense marking on the nonfinite verb. This form always means that the speaker did not witness (or does not remember witnessing) the event expressed in the verb. The *t-V-se* form sometimes occurs with *eei* ‘to be’ as an auxiliary; however, the auxiliary verb is generally elided. The position of the elided auxiliary in the sentence can be monitored via the plural marker *\_to*, which occurs immediately before where the auxiliary verb would have been.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Carlin’s article is her section entitled “Evidentiality and the finite/nonfinite verb”. In this section she introduces a previously unnoticed function of the *t-V-se* construction (11) regarding evidentiality. Carlin claims that there is a form that expresses certainty (*-e*) (12) and a form that expresses noncertainty (*-n(ë)*) (13).

(11) *t-onota-e*                      *kanawa-imë*  
*tï-fall-NF*                      boat-AUG  
‘the airplane landed (or crashed)’  
(Carlin, 2011, p. 10)

(12) *mure*      *w-arë-Ø-e*                      (*wï*)  
child      1→3-take-PRES-CERT      (1PRO)  
‘I am taking (carrying) the child.’

(13) *j-arë-Ø-n*                      *ji-pawana*  
3→1-take-PRES-NCERT                      1POSS-friend  
‘my friend is taking me’  
(Carlin, 2011, p. 6)

She argues that when in the past tense, these last two forms (in 12 and 13) translate into coding witnessed versus unwitnessed events, “ A finite, person-marked, tensed verb is used to express that the speaker was witness to the event (state or action) [...] By





1. The *t-V-se* construction is not a verb marked for past tense because the verb is not marked for tense, at all
2. None of the participants are referred to directly via person marking on the verb
3. The *t-V-se* form can take the nonverbal negation marker
4. By analyzing this form in the same way as a past-tense finite verb, evidentiality cannot be captured

She claims that these reasons make a finite verb analysis “explanatorily inadequate” (Carlin, 2011, p.13). Clearly the first three points are correct descriptions of the facts, although it is not clear that her conclusion necessarily follows from these facts. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address this argument, so for now, I turn to Carlin’s discussion of theticity.

### **3.3 Theticity in Carlin (2011)**

Carlin’s article claims that *t-V-se* is the “thetic construction” in Tiriyo’. In this section I will present Carlin’s arguments and support for this claim, and then explain why I disagree with both her claim and the evidence she uses to support it. Carlin begins with a very thorough theoretical definition of theticity. She states that a thetic utterance is a logically unstructured, unary, statement that posits a state of affairs as a whole (Carlin, 2011, p. 16). Carlin enumerates Sasse’s (1987) observed strategies found in other languages for forming thetic utterances: word order inversion, intonation (strongly accented subject), subject plus relative clause, subject incorporation, particles, special morphology, and verb nominalization (Carlin, 2011, p. 15). Verb nominalization is the strategy Carlin focuses on in her article. It should be noted that all of the examples Carlin discusses are examples of grammar, and by both Carlin (2011, p. 17) and Sasse’s

(2006, p. 262-263) own admissions, grammar cannot be used as evidence to support the identification of theticity in discourse. It is this admission that causes Carlin trouble when it comes to her operational definition of theticity.

Carlin gives a laundry list of reasons to support her claim that the *t-V-se* construction is inherently thetic. Several of these reasons involve the grammar of Tiriyo. First, the verb is made nonfinite and may occur with the existential “to be” verb. She argues that in order to form a thetic utterance, Tiriyo employs grammatical means to remove the subject-predicate relation (Carlin, 2011, p. 21). In this case that means making the verb nonfinite, which means that it does not conjugate for person and must thus co-occur with a finite verb. In the *t-V-se* construction, this finite verb is the ‘to be’ verb. She claims that this formal difference between finite and nonfinite clauses mirrors their difference in meaning. That is, there is a pragmatic distinction between the two clause types (the finite verb for witnessed evidentiality, and the nonfinite verb for non-witnessed evidentiality) that is reflected by this structural difference. Another one of Carlin’s reasons is that the corresponding A (transitive subject) of a categorical utterance is relegated to the postpositional phrase in the *t-V-se* form (Carlin, 2011, p. 21). She argues that,

taking random verbs as examples, where the central unit is the state of affairs (nonfinite verb) that is existing (BE) at it is attributed by main even participants. These participants are those which are normally expressed on a nominalized verb as possessor, that is S in the case of intransitive verbs and O in the case of transitive verbs... Since these entities are taken as part of the event, all other entities such as those denoting person, time, and space are outside of the event and fall under the label “in relation to.”

(Carlin, 2011, p. 21-22)

While it is true that these changes in grammar might make a good way to code something like a thetic function, there is no shortage of languages that have constructions with very parallel grammar (for instance English passive), but which clearly do not necessarily code thetic function. So these are not valid arguments for identifying a thetic meaning to the *t-V-se* construction.

Two of her arguments are related to focus, which is a function closely related to theticity: (i) “it is precisely the lack of focus of any of the constituents and instead the synthesis of the substance which is contained in the subject and the predicate that makes is preferable to use the term ‘thetic’ to describe the type of structure where a situation or event is ‘posited as being in existence’ (Carlin, 2011, p. 15), and (ii) there is a nominal scope negation marker. However it is my opinion that these two arguments can be collapsed into a singular argument about focus, because nominal scope negation always involves focus. This leaves Carlin with just one non-grammatical argument to support her claim that the *t-V-se* form is a truly thetic form. Carlin’s admission that grammar cannot be used as evidence to support labeling a construction as thetic cuts the legs out from under her own argumentation. Out of 7 original arguments (6 if you collapse the two non-grammatical arguments) only 1 remains possibly valid, and that is her claim that that there is a lack of focus in the constituents.

The next question is how does Carlin identify the lack of focused constituents in this construction? That is, how did she decide that a given sentence has no focused constituents? As we see in section 2, Güldemann (2010) and Schultze-Berndt & Simard (2012) looked at lots of examples in recorded speech and then figured out which ones were “funny” in their meaning. In contrast, none of Carlin’s examples are taken from

extended discourse. She gives no indication of where she acquired these examples, nor does she provide context for the utterances. This forces the reader to accept her judgments, including some examples with odd English translations.

(16) [State of Affairs EXIST]	Attribute	In Relation to
<i>tī-tunta-e</i>	( <i>nai</i> )	<i>wëri</i> <i>ëkëi-më</i> <i>i-pata-pona</i>
<i>tī-arrive-NF</i>	(s/he/it.is)	woman    snake-AUG 3POSS-village- DIR
‘the woman arrived at the anaconda village’ (there is an event of arriving woman (involved) with respect to anaconda village)		
(Carlin, 2011, p.22)		

Without knowing who said this and in what discourse context, we cannot evaluate whether her claim about ‘all new information’ (no presupposition) is valid for this example. As it stands, her entire argument seems to be based on how she has restructured the translation.

Perhaps my greatest objection to Carlin’s article is the claim she makes in the final sentences of her conclusion:

In conclusion, given that structures parallel to the *tī-V-se* construction do exist in the nominal domain and given the extent of the use of nominalizations combined with the use ofthetic constructions, it seems not illogical to conclude that Trio (and perhaps many other Cariban languages) is athetic-oriented language, that is, that the subject-predicate type of constructions found with finite verbs is the marked one, rather than the default. In other words, it is quite possible that for Trio, categorical statements, that is, bipartite subject-predicate clauses, are not the basic type of syntactic construction.

(Carlin, 2011, p. 31)

This conclusion is problematic to me for a number of reasons. I emphatically disagree that athetic utterance can be an unmarked construction, which I discuss in Section 4. I also find her conclusion that Tiriyo is athetic-oriented language a premature

conclusion, given that this would mean that Tiriyo is different from any other language ever described.

Now, what if we were to actually look at some recorded Tiriyo discourse? We could look at a cohesive narrative to see what role the *t-V-se* construction plays. Will we find clear cases of functionalthetic sentences? These are all questions I considered when analyzing some Tiriyo texts for myself.

#### 4. Analysis of Tiriyo Discourse

Five texts were analyzed for this study, taken from the appendix of Sérgio Meira's (1999) work, *A Grammar of Tiriyo*. Some of these texts are traditional stories, while others are personal narratives. Each text was thoroughly glossed by Meira, who also provides a context for how each was obtained. Text A1 is a personal narrative of Pedro Asehpë, and tells the story of his childhood. It talks about his father teaching him to hunt and medicating him so that he will become a great hunter. Text A2 is another personal narrative, which describes how the narrator, Naaki, came to live among the Tiriyo people. Text A3 is a retelling of a previously written account of traditional medicinal knowledge of the Tiriyo. It is very short, and contains many references to body parts. Text A4 is the only text that was not orally narrated. It was written in Tiriyo by César (Lampi) and is a calendar of the activities of the Tiriyo throughout the year. Interestingly, the names for all the months were written in Portuguese. The final text, A5, is one of the richest texts in this discourse analysis. It is a traditional folk tale narrated by Pedro Asehpë. It is *The Story of the Woodpecker and the Blind Man*, and tells the tale of a blind, ugly man who regains his sight and good looks by returning the feather hats that he had stolen from the birds of the forest. The rest of this section is organized as follows: in 4.1, I explain my own operational definitions, in 4.2 I show the results of my analysis of *t-V-se* clauses, and in 4.3 I show some examples ofthetic clauses that I identified in these text.

## 4.1 Definitions

In my analysis, I utilized several key concepts, which I define here. These include, focus, markedness, and my operational definition of theticity (necessary in order to not make the theoretical/operational leap that I mentioned in Section 2).

### Markedness

The notion of markedness is all about expectations. The **unmarked** form is the standard or common form (as in word order). Nobody notices when a speaker uses the unmarked form, because it is the norm. In my analysis, I determine the unmarked form via statistical analysis. In analyzing the markedness of a construction, like *t-V-se*, the more frequent it is, the less marked it is. In analyzing the different word orders in a series of sentences from discourse, the unmarked order is the one that occurs most frequently. In contrast, a **marked** form is unusual or out of the ordinary, statistically rare, or deviating from the standard. A marked clause stands in direct contrast to the ordinary unmarked clause. In a text, constructions can be statistically marked (meaning they are rare), pragmatically marked (meaning they convey some unexpected information), and/or grammatically marked (meaning they have “extra” grammar to mark the unexpected meaning).

Looking for an operational definition, markedness is reflected in frequencies; marked constructions or word orders should be infrequent. I determine marked utterances in the same way as I determine unmarked utterances, by counting all of the constructions and word order variations that occur in Meira’s texts and determining their statistical frequency. The high frequency patterns are unmarked; the rare patterns are marked. A topic-comment (categorical) clause should be the most frequent,



therefore unmarked, clause type in a narrative, and in contrast,thetic utterances should be rare (Schultze-Berndt, 2008, p. 5). The standard (unmarked) clause type should follow the standard word order, whereas marked word orders usually indicate some sort of marked focus (for example, Carlin's observation that initial position is reserved for new information), often including theticity (examples from Sasse 1987, 2006; Lambrecht 1994; van der Wal 2008; and Schultze-Berndt 2008).

Markedness is important because it allows me to determine which sentences are interesting from a linguistics standpoint. An unmarked clause is not very interesting; it is in the marked clauses where linguists can make new discoveries.

## **Focus**

I have mentioned focus several times already, but it is also a notion that I need to define operationally, because it is a nongrammatical aspect by which we can measure whether an utterance is thetic or categorical. A technical definition is: "The semantic component of a pragmatically structured proposition whereby the assertion differs from the presupposition" (Lambrecht, 1994, p. 213). This is like the old idea (very Aristotelian) that the average sentence starts from something the listener knows (the presupposition, also called the topic) and adds something to it (the item in focus, also called the comment). A presupposition is what the speaker assumes the hearer already knows or takes for granted, making it knowledge that is shared between the listener and the speaker. In terms of storytelling, the presupposition is often made up of participants who have already been introduced and events that have already happened in the story. An assertion is something that the speaker wants the listener to become aware of as a result of hearing the speaker's sentence. Often, the assertion is in focus. When the

storyteller wants to introduce a new character or event, this is when he makes an assertion in a sentence.

When looking for examples of focus in Tiriyo texts, I had two main methods. First, I looked at every clause to see how both presupposed (shared, old, given) information and new information was presented. In particular I focused on clauses that introduced new participants. Second, since changes of word order are an important way of helping a listener focus on one part of a sentence, and since Carlin mentions that new information usually comes first, I carefully analyzed marked word orders for focused participants.

Among the many kinds of focus that linguists have written about, I found a particularly large number of examples of **Expanding Focus** (Dik, 1987). Expanding focus is a mechanism for adding information to the previously presupposed information. This is easy to identify operationally because it involves creating lists, as in (17).

(17) Sally drinks coffee with breakfast.  
Yes, but she also drinks **orange juice**.

### **Sentence Focus/Theticity (Operational)**

I identify a thetic utterance based on its context in discourse and its function. The thetic functions I am looking for are Sasse's (1987) diagnostic contexts for thetic utterances (listed in Section 2). In particular I focus on 1-4: Existential statements, explanations, surprising or unexpected events, and general statements. I identify these thetic contexts intuitively, using my best judgment to weigh the information in each clause, seeing which is new and which is presupposed, looking specifically for clauses in which I see no presentation of presupposed knowledge.

## 4.2 Results of the Discourse Analysis of *t-V-se*

Performing a discourse analysis on Meira's texts was very interesting. I initially started reading through the texts and attempting to mark any clauses that seemed overtly thetic. However, this method was not nearly as straightforward as it looked. This prompted me to step back and perform a fuller analysis of just the *t-V-se* clauses. I removed all of the *t-V-se* clauses from their texts and performed several tests on them: overall frequency of *t-V-se*, variation of word order in *t-V-se* clauses, and specific analysis of focus in individual clauses. The first test was designed to give me an idea of the density of *t-V-se* utterances in discourse. I simply divided the number of *t-V-se* clauses by the total number of clauses for a particular text and determined what percent of each text was made up of that particular clause type. I then looked for instances of theticity within the *t-V-se* construction, and, finally, for instances of theticity throughout the texts in any construction at all.

Upon analyzing the Tiriyo texts appended to Sérgio Meira's *A Grammar of Tiriyo* (1999), it is quite clear that the *t-V-se* construction does not solely express theticity. Example (18) clearly illustrates a *t-V-se* clause coding a categorical utterance. This clause occurs in *The Story of the Woodpecker and the Blind Man* after the blind man's wife asks him to climb a dead *kumu* tree, which she tells him is alive and asks him to pick fruit from. Nothing about this utterance is thetic. The information contained in it is neither "all-new" nor is it "out of the blue". All the participants are given information, previously identified in the text and therefore presupposed, and even the event is not surprising, considering there is no way that this particular *kumu* tree could bear fruit.

- (18) *Anpo\_nai,           tiikaē                           injo.*  
 an-po\_n-ai           ti-w-ka-se                           i-njo  
 wh-Loc\_3Sa-Cop Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst 3-husband  
 ‘‘Where is it (= *kumu* fruit)?’ said her husband.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 661)

Turning to markedness, if the *t-V-se* construction codes theticity, then it should be quite rare in these texts (relative to the ‘‘much more frequent topic-comment (‘predicate focus’, ‘categorical’) constructions,’’ Schultze-Berndt, 2008, p. 5). Previous definitions, theoretical and operational alike, suggest that thetic utterances are expected to be highly marked in the sense of having a low discourse frequency. However, the *t-V-se* construction has a high discourse frequency. Table 1 illustrates that the *t-V-se* form comprises a high percentage of the utterances in three of these stories.

	A1	A2	A5
Number of <i>t-V-se</i> clauses	31/145	20/76	177/337
Percent <i>t-V-se</i> clauses	21.4%	26.3%	52.5%

Table 1: *t-V-se* clause density

It seems highly unlikely that any sort of cohesive story could be told when one fourth (texts A1 and A2) or even more than half of the utterances (text A 5) in a narrative convey all-new information. This suggests that the role of the *t-V-se* construction is much more complex than simply being the thetic construction, and as such we would expect to see it used with ordinary clauses, like that in (18). As mentioned in Section 3,

Carlin argues that it is possible that the thetic construction is unmarked in Tiriyo. However, based on the information given above, it seems that such a phenomenon would be highly inconvenient for the speakers of the language. Additionally, my next few paragraphs will demonstrate that the unmarked word orders in Tiriyo express many categorical statements. Carlin, herself, spends time developing the argument that the *t-V-se* construction is thetic despite its relatively high frequency (Carlin, 2011, p. 20). She argues:

It does not seem illogical to conclude that a Trio might not want to make a predicative statement about an entity or referent whose person and actions are outside of his/her sphere of firsthand reference. While these pragmatic issues are highly relevant for Trio culture, it is clear that they do find expression in the linguistic structure as well, namely by using the thetic rather than a subject predicate strategy to express all those events that the speaker has no knowledge of; that is, s/he has not only not seen the referent, but s/he has also not witnessed the action. Thus to make a statement about someone they have not seen carrying out an action expressed in that statement would be highly uncharacteristic for the Trio.

(Carlin, 2011, p. 20)

This argument is frustrating on two counts. First it is using something extralinguistic, the Tiriyo culture, to make an argument to support a linguistic conclusion. This seems as if she has to say that the Tiriyo language is unique from other languages in order to make her argument work. The second way that this argument is frustrating is that all of this information of evidentiality and Tiriyo culture may be true, but that does not mean the construction has to be thetic. The evidentiality function of the *t-V-se* clause can stand alone, and does not need to be tied to theticity.

My second test was designed to analyze word order flexibility within the *t-V-se* clause. I took all of the *t-V-se* clauses and determined in which order either A, V, and O, or S, and V appeared. I then found the percentage of occurrence of each word order

(such as OVA or VS). The raw data of this analysis can be found in the appendix.

Following this analysis, I looked at the statistically marked word orders to determine the function of those word orders. My second reason for arguing that the *t-V-se* form is not solely a thetic form is that it contains a lot of variation in word order. The standard, or unmarked, word order in Tiriyó and the *t-V-se* form is OVA (19) for transitive clauses and VS (20) for intransitive clauses. This includes the common situation where a very topical participant is dropped, such as VA (21) or OV (22).

	O		V		A
(19)	<i>irëme</i>	[ <i>pija_sa</i>	<i>wiraapa</i> ]	<i>tirëe</i>	<i>iija.</i>
	<i>irëme</i>	<i>pija_sa</i>	<i>wiraapa</i>	<i>tī-rī-se</i>	<i>i- :ja</i>
	so	small_a.bit	bow	Rm.Pst-make-Rm.Pst	3-Agt
	'so he made a little bow.'				

(Meira, 1999, p. 607)

	V		S
(20)	<i>saasaame</i>	<i>teese</i>	<i>pahko.</i>
	<i>saasaame</i>	<i>t-w-ei-se</i>	<i>pahko</i>
	happy	Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst	1:father
	'my father was (= had become) happy.'		

(Meira, 1999, p. 608)

	V		A
(21)	<i>Tinontae</i>		<i>wija.</i>
	<i>tī-nonta-se</i>		<i>wija</i>
	Rm.Pst-leave-Rm.Pst		1:Agt
	'I left (her).'		

(Meira, 1999, p. 609)

	O		V
(22)	<i>iputupë_marë</i>	<i>wiripë_me</i>	<i>tirëe,</i>
	<i>i-putupë-rī_marë</i>	<i>wiripë_me</i>	<i>tī-rī-se</i>
	3-hair-Pos_too	bad.one_Attr	Rm.Pst-make-Rm.Pst
	'(they) had also made his hair ugly.'		

(Meira, 1999, p. 691)

Unmarked orders are OVA, and by extension, OV, VA, and V. Together, these total 47 of the 59 *t-V-se* transitive clauses, as seen in Table 2a. Since order changes are

frequently identified as markingthetic utterances, it is suspicious that the *t-V-se* construction uses mostly the unmarked order. However, there are also 12 clauses with marked orders, including 9 that place the subject first (AOV, AVO, AV) and 6 that place the object at the end (VAO, AVO, VO), as seen in Table 2b. If these orders are used to place special focus on a given participant in an event, then that is evidence that the event is notthetic.

Word Order	Incidence
OVA	25
VA	17
OV	4
V	1

Table 2a: Unmarked Transitive Clauses

Word Order	Incidence
VAO	2
AOV	2
AVO	3
AV	4
VO	1

Table 2b: Marked Transitive Clauses

In intransitive clauses, unmarked orders are VS, and by extension, V=S, and V. Together, these make up 71 of the total 117 *t-V-se* intransitive clauses, as seen in Table 3a. Yet there is also a high number of the marked word order, VS, which makes up 46 of 117 clauses, as seen in Table 3b. This seems to be due to long strings of SV introduction clauses, in which expanding focus is marked by putting the focused item in first position (065-068). So even though this order was more frequent than expected, my findings confirm Carlin's assertion that it is still the pragmatically marked form. A full list of word orders and their frequencies can be found in the Appendix.

Word Order	Incidence
V=S	9
VS	22
V	40

Table 3a: Unmarked Intransitive Clauses

Word Order	Incidence
SV	46

Table 3b: Marked Intransitive Clauses

Returning to the identification of theticity in Tiriyo discourse, beyond recognizing that most of the *t-V-se* clauses follow the unmarked word order, I am not particularly interested in the unmarked forms. Rather, I am interested in those marked word orders that may have only a single incidence in all of the texts examined, because these are the ones that the speakers might be using to show focus on subparts of the sentence. If this is the case, then that would demonstrate that at least a subset of *t-V-se* clauses do not code the thetic function (which by definition has the entire proposition (or sentence) in focus, and which therefore cannot have any specific constituent also in focus). There was a singular instance of AVO word order (23), two instances of a VAO (24, 25) word order, and two instances of AOV word order (26, 27). Regarding the AVO word order (23), this utterance occurs when introducing a new participant into the discourse. The man's father had never been mentioned before and so the speaker wanted to draw the listener's attention to the new participant, a classic example of a focus construction.

- |      |  |                    |                          |
|------|--|--------------------|--------------------------|
|      | A                                      | V                  | O                        |
| (23) | <i>Irë_mao pahko_ja</i>                | <i>tirëe</i>       | <i>jiiraapaapisi,</i>    |
|      | <i>irë_mao pahko_ja</i>                | <i>tī-rī-se</i>    | <i>ji-wīrapa-rī-pisi</i> |
|      | 3InAna_Tmp 1:father_Agt                | Rm.Pst-make-Rm.Pst | 1-bow-Pos-Dim            |
|      | 'Then my father made me a little bow.' |                    |                          |

(Meira, 1999, p. 606)



The VAO order is designed to draw attention to the action of the sentence. In (24), the hummingbird had had his feather hat stolen. The sentence immediately preceding the VAO word order is that the hummingbird was looking for his feather hat. What is important about (24) is neither the agent, nor the object, both of which were identified in the previous discourse (i.e., were presupposed at the moment of speech), but the verb: he found the hat. This is the new information and so it is placed in the focus position at the front of the clause.

	V	A	O
(24)	<i>Ma, tēpoose</i>	<i>iija</i>	<i>tīhpimi.</i>
	ma t-epori-se	i -:ja	tī-hpimi
	Attn Rm.Pst-find-Rm.Pst	3-Agt	3R-feather.hat
	He found his feather hat.		

(Meira, 1999, p. 670)

Similarly, in (25), the focus is on the verb. This example is from the same story as (24), however it comes after the event in (24). The blind man gave the animals back their feather hats, which he had stolen from them. By giving back these hats, the man regained his sight. However, because he had been blind, the man did not know the way back to his village. The woodpecker, who helped him regain his sight, agreed to lead the man back to his village, which is when (25) occurs. The act of taking the man back to his village is the important aspect of the sentence. The man is only mentioned as an after-thought at the end of the sentence, indicating that the verb is the focused element of the clause.

	V	A	O
(25)	<i>Irë_mao_pa</i>	<i>tërëe</i>	<i>iija, enupininpë.</i>
	irë_mao_pa	t-arë-se	i- :ja enu-pini-npë
	3InAna_Tmp_Rpt	Rm.Pst-take-Rm.Pst	3-Agt eye-Ineff.Nzr-Pst
	‘Then he took back (to his village) the one who had been blind.’		

(Meira, 1999, p. 688)

Likewise, the AOV clauses place the first argument in focus, the agent. In (26), there is a long list of toads to take their eggs back from the blind man. However the *muru* toad is the first, and the speaker places focus on this by fronting the agent. In (27), the blind man ate lots of eggs from all different kinds of animals. It was these eggs that caused him to become ugly. It is because the speaker wanted to emphasize the eggs, and not the man or his ugliness, that he focuses on the eggs by fronting them.

	A	O	V
(26)	<i>Irëme wapo_rën, muru_ja_pa</i>	<i>tümo</i>	<i>tünpokaë.</i>
	irëme wapo_rënne muru_ja_pa	tü -:mo	tü-npoka-se
	so first_truly toad.sp_Agt_Rpt	3R-egg	Rm.Pst-remove-Rm.Pst
	‘So, the <i>muru</i> toad was the first to take his egg back.’		
	(Meira, 1999, p. 677)		

	A	O	V
(27)	<i>iimotomo_ja, ipun wiripë_me</i>		<i>tirëe,</i>
	i -:mo-tomo_ja i-punu wiripë_me		tü-ri-se
	3-egg-Col_Agt 3-body bad.one_Attr		Rm.Pst-make-Rm.Pst
	‘the eggs, they had made his body ugly,’		
	(Meira, 1999, p. 691)		

Recall that the theoretical definition of a thetic clause is one with no subconstituent or sub-element in focus. These marked orders give clear examples of focus on individual participants in the *t-V-se* construction. Therefore, it is clear that the *t-V-se* construction is, at least sometimes, used in non-thetic utterances.

Other examples of the *t-V-se* form in clearly non-thetic functions include expanding focus. The Tiriyo texts are full of strings of expanding focus as can be seen in (28-31) and (32-35).

(28)	<i>Omopakë tiwëese.</i>
	omopakë tü-w-ëepi-se
	toad.sp Rm.Pst-Sa-come-Rm.Pst
	‘The <i>omopakë</i> toad came.’

(29) *Korokorokane tiwëese.*  
 korokorokane ti-w-ëepi-se  
 toad.sp Rm.Pst-Sa-come-Rm.Pst  
 ‘The *korokorokane* toad came.’

(30) *Muru tiwëese.*  
 muru ti-w-ëepi-se  
 toad.sp Rm.Pst-Sa-come-Rm.Pst  
 ‘The *muru* toad came.’

(31) *Warara tiwëese.*  
 warara ti-w-ëepi-se  
 toad.sp Rm.Pst-Sa-come-Rm.Pst  
 ‘The *warara* toad came.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 674-675)

In (28-31), the narrator is listing of all of the different types of toads that came to talk to the main character of the story. In (32-35), the narrator, Naaki, is describing the events of his childhood. He was born in Suriname, but came to live with the Tiriyo people in Brazil after the death of his brother, who had raised him. Examples (32-35) list all of the members of his family who had died, in order to emphasize that Naaki was truly alone in the world. While using the *t-V-se* form, these speakers create sentences that place a single argument of the sentence, in these cases, either the species of toad or a member of the family, into focus. Therefore, all of these examples, too, are non-thetic *t-V-se* clauses.

(32) *Pihko waa\_teese,*  
 pihko waa\_t-w-ei-se  
 1:oldr.brthr Neg\_Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst  
 ‘My older brother had died, (lit. ‘my older brother was no more’)’

(33) *ameraarë wa\_ken teese.*  
 ameraarë wa\_kene t-w-ei-se  
 everybody Neg\_Cont Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop\_  
 ‘everybody (= all my folks) were gone. (lit. ‘also no more’)’

- (34) *Pahko waa\_teese, manko waa\_teese,*  
 pahko waa\_t-w-ei-se manko waa\_t-w-ei-se  
 1:father Neg\_Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst 1:mother Neg\_Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst  
 ‘My father had died, my mother had died, (lit. my father was no more, my  
 mother was no more)’
- (35) *ameraarë tî-w-ëtihka-e.*  
 ameraarë tî-w-ëtihka-se  
 everybody Rm.Pst-Sa-be.over-Rm.Pst  
 ‘they were all gone, there was nobody left. (lit. ‘everybody was over/gone’)  
 (Meira, 1999, p. 636)

Having established that the *t-V-se* construction is not, in fact, dedicated exclusively to thethetic function in Tiriyó, we are left with the question of what the actual function (or functions) of this construction is in discourse. The most obvious answer comes from Carlin’s own observation, that it is the construction for expressing non-witnessed evidentiality, and, of course, this function would not be something limited to sentences with no focus. For example, what if you want to describe athetic event that you directly witnessed? If *t-V-se* is the only “thetic construction,” then what construction codes an eyewitnessed “out of the blue” event? What if you want to tell someone about a non-witnessed event, but it is about a continuing topic or it has a particular participant in focus? If *t-V-se* coded onlythetic non-witnessed event, then what construction codes non-thetic non-witnessed events? This construction must have some other role besides codingthetic utterances.

After analyzing several narrative texts, it seems that one of its functions is to move the storyline forward when the narrator did not see the event. There is a high correlation between the *t-V-se* construction and events in discourse (36, 37). These examples fit Payne’s (1992) definition of a Main Event Line. This definition has two criteria:

(a) It must report an event as actually occurring [in the universe of discourse]. The “event” cannot be a hypothetical one that is presented as possibly occurring in the future or one that might have occurred in the past. States, which are nonevents by definition, are also excluded. (b) The actual reporting of the event must advance the action of the narrative along a chronological time line. Thus, it depends on the rhetorical relation of sequence (Payne, 1992, p. 379).

When events are repeated, they are also in the *t-V-se* form (38-41). There is also a high correlation between the *t-V-se* construction and asserted material (especially new assertions) in a narrative (42). This correlation between the *t-V-se* construction and narrative function nicely incorporates the possibility that it expresses boththetic and categorical utterances.

(36) *Irëme tütëe,*  
 irëme tî-w-të-se  
 so Rm.Pst-Sa-go-Rm.Pst  
 ‘Then they went,’

(37) *serë apo tükae ipi,*  
 serë apo tî-w-ka-se i-pitî  
 3InPx like Rm.Pst-Sa-say-Rm.Pst 3-wife  
 ‘and his wife said this, (lit. said like this)’

(Meira, 1999, p. 658)

(38) *Irëme, mëkînpëkenton iimo, tënëe iija.*  
 irëme mëkînpëken-tomo i -:mo t-ënë-se i -:ja  
 so animal-Col 3-egg Rm.Pst-eat.meat-Rm.Pst 3-Agt  
 ‘So he ate the eggs of all kinds of animals.’

(39) *ameraarë, mëkînpëkenton iimo, tënëe iija.*  
 ameraarë mëkînpëken-tomo i -:mo t-ënë-se i -:ja  
 all animal-Col 3-egg Rm.Pst-eat.meat-Rm.Pst 3-Agt  
 ‘all of them, he ate the eggs of all kinds of animals.’

(40) *Ma, sehken, tënëe iija, përeru iimo\_marë.*  
 ma sehkene t-ënë-se i -:ja përeru i -:mo\_marë  
 Attn likewise Rm.Pst-eat.meat-Rm.Pst 3-Agt toad.sp 3-egg\_too  
 Likewise, he ate toad eggs, too.

- (41) *Përëru iimo, enahpin, tënaase iija.*  
 përreru i -:mo enapī-pīnī t-enapī-se i- :ja  
 toad.sp 3-egg eat.sweet-Ineff.Nzr Rm.Pst-eat.sweet-Rm.Pst 3-Agt  
 ‘Toad eggs, which are not fit for eating, he ate.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 655)

- (42) *Ma, serë apo, enupininpë teese, pena.*  
 ma serë apo enu-pīnī-npë t-w-ei-se pena  
 Attn 3InPx like eye-Ineff.Nzr-Pst Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst long.ago  
 ‘This is what he was like, the one who was blind, long ago.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 654)

Because athetic utterance is used to introduce new information or to convey something “out of the blue” it would not make sense for individuals to be constantly speaking in thetic sentences, or even for them to express multiple thetic utterances in a row. In text A5, lines 180-188 are all in the *t-V-se* form, which would be a long time to speak in only thetic utterances. Based on my analysis, the discourse frequency seems consistent with the idea that the *t-V-se* form is used as a narrative device and its function is to move the storyline forward. Examples (43-47) come from *The Story of the Woodpecker and the Blind Man*. The subject from these examples is the blind man, to whom we have been previously introduced. Immediately before these examples, the blind man was tricked by his wife into climbing up a tree. One at the top, the blind man’s wife deserted him. These lines are the process of his descent back to the ground. We know they are not out of the blue because they are expected based on the immediately preceding events of the narrative.

- (43) *Irëme tîwihhtëe\_pa, tîwihhtëe\_pa,*  
 irëme tî-w-ihhtë-se\_pa tî-w-ihhtë-se\_pa  
 then Rm.Pst-Sa-go.down-Rm.Pst\_Rpt Rm.Pst-Sa-go.down-Rm.Pst\_Rpt  
 ‘Then he went down, and down,’

- (44) *tīwih̄tēe\_* , *tīwih̄tēe\_pa*, *tun*,  
 tī-w-ih̄tē-se\_pa tī-w-ih̄tē-se\_pa tun  
 Rm.Pst-Sa-go.down-Rm.Pst\_Rpt Rm.Pst-Sa-go.down-Rm.Pst\_Rpt fall.Ideo  
 ‘he went down, and down, [tuN] (= he landed on the ground),’
- (45) *mērē\_po\_pa* *wein̄n nono\_htao\_pa*, *anotaewa teese*,  
 mērē\_po\_pa wein̄n nono\_htao anota-sewa t-w-ei-se  
 3InMd\_Loc\_Rpt Ptc? ground\_Loc\_Rpt fall-Neg Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst  
 ‘he was back there, on the ground, he did not fall,’
- (46) *epahkaewa teese*, *kumu ikuipu*  
 e-pahka-sewa t-w-ei-se kumu i-kuipu  
 Detr-break-Neg Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst palm.sp 3-dead.tree  
 ‘the dead *kumu* tree did not break.’
- (47) *Ma, irē\_mao*, *tikē\_tikēhtunje*, *nono\_po\_pa tīwehtuuwē*.  
 ma irē\_mao tī-kē\_tī-kēhtumu-se nono\_po\_pa tī-w-ei-tuuwē  
 Attn 3InAna\_Tmp E.RD\_Rm.Pst-shout-Rm.Pst ground\_Loc\_Rpt 3R-Sa-Cop-Post  
 ‘Then he started shouting, after he came back to the ground.’  
 (Meira, 1999, p. 678-679)

The *t-V-se* construction expresses multiple focus types, so it is not an exclusively thetic construction. It also moves the storyline forward, which, again, is not a thetic function. So what grammar actually does code thetic utterances in Tiriyó?

### 4.3 Looking for Theticity in Tiriyó Discourse

Ultimately, when looking for instances of theticity in the texts on my own, it was difficult. Nearly every operational definition of theticity involved the researcher’s intuition. This intuition was not something I could replicate in my own study of Tiriyó. It was also incredibly difficult for me to trust my own intuition, because my training at the University of Oregon taught me to be wary of intuition and to always support your hunches with evidence and a solid operational definition. However, the examples I did find seemed to fall into 3 categories that correlate with Sasse’s (1987) functions of

thetic sentences (as listed in the Güldemann (2010) quote in section 3.1). These categories are Existential Statements, Explanations, and General Statements.

The best examples of theticity that I found were in story A4, the Tiriyo calendar. This calendar was almost designed to create thetic utterances. It is a book of pictures where each page is a new month. It was designed to imitate western calendars, and the makers of the calendar were asked to describe what was interesting about each month. With this design, every page turn creates a situation where there is no presupposed information and you would expect an ‘all-new’ utterance.

Existential Statements

- (48) *Janeiro\_po\_n-ai konopo i-pitë-to,*  
*Janeiro\_po\_n-ai konopo i-pitë-topo*  
 January\_Loc\_3Sa-Cop rain 3-begin-Circ.Nzr  
 ‘In January, rains begin (lit. it is the beginning of the rains)’

(Meira, 1999, p. 641)

- (49) *Ma, junho\_po iijeeta wapu,*  
*ma junho\_po iijeeta wapu*  
 Attn June\_Loc a.lot açai  
 ‘In June there are many açai palm trees,’

(Meira, 1999, p. 648)

- (50) *Serë apo\_nai outubro\_po iwehto.*  
*serë apo\_n-ai outubro\_po i-w-ei-topo*  
 3InPx like\_3Sa-Cop October\_Loc 3-Sa-Cop-Circ.Nzr  
 ‘October is like this. (lit. Being in October is like this).’

(Meira, 1999, p. 651)

Explanations

- (51) *Irë apo\_n-ai tarëno iwehto.*  
*irë apo\_n-ai tarëno i-w-ei-topo*  
 3InAna like\_3Sa-Cop Tiriyo 3-Sa-Cop-Circ.Nzr  
 ‘This is the way of the Tiriyo (lit. this is what the Tiriyo are like).’

(Meira, 1999, p. 643)



### General Statements

- (52) *irë apo\_nai.*  
irë apo\_n-ai  
3InAna like\_3Sa-Cop  
'So it is.'

(Meira, 1999, p. 646)

- (53) *Irë apo\_n-ai tarëno iwehto abril\_po.*  
irë apo\_n-ai tarëno i-w-ei-topo abril\_po  
3InAna like\_3Sa-Cop Tiriyó 3-Sa-Cop-Circ.Nzr April\_Loc  
'So are the Tiriyó in April.'

(Meira, 1999, p. 646)

However, not every example of possiblethetic function came from the calendar text. There were others found throughout the texts. I am going to take one example from different function types and provide the context of the example in order to demonstrate why this particular utterance isthetic.

Example (54) is an existentialthetic statement. It was taken from a text called *Katamüimë Siminatë*, which is a text documenting traditional medicinal knowledge. It is the first statement in the text, and therefore has no presupposed information; it is all new.

### Existential Statements

- (54) *Serë\_nai putupë epi.*  
serë\_n-ai putupë epitĩ-Ø  
3InPx\_3Sa-Cop head medicine-Pos  
'This is head(ache) medicine'

(Meira, 1999, p. 638)

The Explanations category is interesting. Several times in Tiriyó narratives the narrator asks and answers his own questions. This makes examples (55) and (56) fairly self-explanatory. Because of this, I am going to explain example (57). This example is also from *The Story of the Woodpecker and the Blind Man*. It comes from a part of the narrative where the animals are taking back their feather hats by yanking them from the

blind man. Immediately before (57) the blind man says “Ouch!”, making (57) an explanation for his outburst.

Explanations

(55) *Atitoome? Nari\_ke\_ta jiweihpë\_ke.*  
 atitoome nari\_ke\_taikē ji-w-ei-hpë\_ke  
 why fear\_Inst\_Neg 1-Sa-Cop:N-Pst.Pos\_Inst  
 ‘Why? Because I had become fearless.’

(Meira, 1999, p. 612)

(56) *Atitoome, enuura iwei\_ke,*  
 atitoome enu-:ra i-w-ei-rï\_ke  
 why eye-Ineff.Azr 3-Sa-Cop:N-Pos\_Inst  
 ‘Why? Because he was blind,’

(Meira, 1999, p. 661)

(57) *kutuma teese*  
 kutumaka t-w-ei-se  
 painful Rm.Pst-Sa-Cop-Rm.Pst  
 ‘it was painful (to remove it),’

(Meira, 1999, p. 678)

This list of probable thetic utterances taken from discourse illustrates that thetic utterances can appear in many forms. Some of these forms do not even include verbs (54), and some are actually in the *t-V-se* form (57). This data is consistent with the idea that grammar does not define a thetic utterance in Tiriyó. Here we see that Tiriyó treats thetic utterances just like the other languages described in Section 2: the grammar that codes them varies within a language, and even within a single story in a language.

## 5. Conclusion

This study has made the pitfalls of intuitive methodology clear. This “trust my judgment” strategy of research is not empirically viable because it is not replicable. If another researcher cannot read your article and expand on your research with the methods you detailed, then your research is ineffective and does not contribute to the academic community. This study has also highlighted a major flaw in the subfield of thetic research, namely the theoretical/operational leap. This ingrained issue in thetic research enforces the notion that a strong, convincing theoretical definition means very little if there is no operational definition by which individuals can gather evidence to support it. It is essential that linguists detail their methods and test their hypotheses rigorously, rather than looking for (or concocting) only those translations that are consistent with those hypotheses. Because there is an inherently subjective aspect to linguistic research, linguists must be very careful to avoid infusing their conclusions with bias, which is what happens when researchers look predominantly for examples to support their hypothesis. It is essential that they also search for data that could refute their claims. That is good science, and it will only make a researcher’s final conclusions stronger.

The process of writing this thesis was much different than I expected. When I first learned about Carlin’s paper in my syntax class I figured that my research would be straightforward. I would find out what I disagreed with in her article and then find examples that contradicted her claims. What I did not expect was that my research would delve into the underlying structure of linguistic research; however, I am grateful that it did. After researching and analyzing both thetic and operational definitions I feel

that my knowledge of the processes behind linguistic research is greater than it ever has been. Writing this thesis also forced me to learn how to teach linguistic concepts to others. It forced me to understand these concepts on a much deeper level than I ever had. In learning how to do linguistic research, all of these concepts are tools that build upon each other, and I never had to consider why they worked. However, explaining them in my thesis gave me the opportunity to consider those tools and to turn what has become intuitive knowledge about linguistic research into explicit steps that someone with no previous linguistic experience could understand. This experience has deepened my connection to and solidified my passion for linguistic analysis.

## Appendix

Word Order	Incidence	Category	Percent of All Clauses	Percent of Category Clauses
V=S	4	VINTR	1.639344262	3.076923077
VS	9	VINTR	3.68852459	6.923076923
SV	33	VINTR	13.52459016	25.38461538
XV=S	4	VINTR	1.639344262	3.076923077
XSV	5	VINTR	2.049180328	3.846153846
XSVX	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
S	10	VINTR	4.098360656	7.692307692
SXV	4	VINTR	1.639344262	3.076923077
VSX	3	VINTR	1.229508197	2.307692308
SVX	3	VINTR	1.229508197	2.307692308
VX	3	VINTR	1.229508197	2.307692308
XV=SX	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
XVS	8	VINTR	3.278688525	6.153846154
XV	15	VINTR	6.147540984	11.53846154
V	17	VINTR	6.967213115	13.07692308
XXV	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
XVX	3	VINTR	1.229508197	2.307692308
V-NEGX	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
SX	2	VINTR	0.819672131	1.538461538
SVS	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
XVXS	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
XVXSX	1	VINTR	0.409836066	0.769230769
OVA	16	VTR	6.557377049	23.1884058
AVO	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
VA	13	VTR	5.327868852	18.84057971
XV=OA	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
O-VXX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
OVAX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
V=OAX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
XOVA	7	VTR	2.868852459	10.14492754
AV=O	2	VTR	0.819672131	2.898550725
OVAO	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
O	6	VTR	2.459016393	8.695652174
VO	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
A	3	VTR	1.229508197	4.347826087
AVX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
XVA	2	VTR	0.819672131	2.898550725
V	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362

VAO	2	VTR	0.819672131	2.898550725
XXAOV	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
OXVA	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
XAVX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
AOXV	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
OXV	2	VTR	0.819672131	2.898550725
O-V-NEGX	1	VTR	0.409836066	1.449275362
AV	2	VTR	0.819672131	2.898550725
[QTE]VS	1	QTE	0.409836066	2.325581395
XSV[QTE]	1	QTE	0.409836066	2.325581395
[QTE]V	30	QTE	12.29508197	69.76744186
[QTE]	5	QTE	2.049180328	11.62790698
[QTE]VS	4	QTE	1.639344262	9.302325581
[QTE]VSX	2	QTE	0.819672131	4.651162791
XXCOPX	1	OTHER	0.409836066	50
XXCOPS	1	OTHER	0.409836066	50
Total				
Clauses	244			
Total VINTR	130			
Total VTR	69			
Total QTE	43			
Total OTHER	2			

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