

## Interactional functions as part of the grammar? *The suffix –ba in Cha’palaa*

(Main session) The verbal morphology of Cha’palaa, a Barbacoan language from coastal Ecuador, provides a challenge for language description, with some interesting theoretical implications. During fieldwork, we observed a set of mutually-exclusive verb-final morphemes that form finite verbs, but whose meanings were difficult to identify. Unlike values such as tense or person that are relatively constant across contexts, the meanings of these morphemes become bleached outside of usage context, and consultants judge similar sentences with different finite morphemes as equivalent:

- (1) In ruku in ama-nu ji-’-kee-we/-mi/-ba  
1POSS husband 1POSS mother-ACC go-SR-see-we/-mi/-ba  
‘My husband visited my mother.’ (speaker interpretation for all 3 forms)

Despite their difficulty in expressing intuitions about the meaning of these different options, speakers select between them for different reasons. By examining natural speech recordings it is possible to associate these different morphemes with specific interactional functions. For example, the suffix *–ba* is commonly used when speakers contradict assumptions of their interlocutors. The following two examples illustrate both relatively overt and covert assumptions countered with *-ba* constructions.

- (2) J: supu miya-jtu-u jun-tsa.  
female have.kin-NEG-Q DM.DST.SEM  
‘Doesn’t he have a wife, that one?’

L: miya-tju-ba (.) uma-a tsa-i-’ de-ji.  
have.kin-NEG-**ba** now-FOC SEM-become-SR PL-go  
‘He doesn’t have (a wife) -**ba** (.) (we) recently went (and saw) like that.’

In (2) J asks a question based on his previous assumption about the referent. In the next turn L counters this assumption, using the morpheme *-ba*. In the sequence that (3) is extracted from, J is questioning R’s statement that a plantain field was ready for harvest; J says it seems like there would be only a few big bunches, but R counters that there are more than that, using the morpheme *–ba*.

- (3) J: seis o siete-sha na-mee-ten-ña-a aa-bulu-tene  
six or seven-LOC be.in.POS-DUB-EV.INF-FOC AUG-body-only  
‘six or seven or them, it seems, only big bunches.’

R: tsa-de-na de-na-ba de-na  
SEM-PL-be.in.POS PL-be.in.POS-**ba** PL-be.in.POS  
‘(more) are there, (more) are there -**ba**, (more) are there.’

The meaning of *–ba* that holds across instances is best described in terms of its interactive function, which can be interpreted as marking a sense of “contrary to what you may think”. Similar kinds of intersubjective operations have been described for the sentence-initial particle *actually* in English (Clift 2001) and the Dutch final particle *hoor* (Mazeland 2011). Sometimes these independent words are called “pragmatic particles”, but Cha’palaa presents a case in which a comparable function is part of the core area of bound finite verb morphology. Due to this, seeking accounts for *-ba* and other Cha’palaa verbal morphology based on pragmatic and interactive motivations may often be the best strategy for grammatical description, raising interesting theoretical questions about how the interactive functions of discourse particles can, in some languages, form a central part of the grammar.

Clift, Rebecca. 2001. Meaning in interaction: the case of *actually*. *Language* 77 (2): 245-91.

Mazeland, H., and P. Leendert. 2011. ‘Doing confirmation with *ja/nee hoor*. Sequential and prosodic characteristics of a Dutch discourse particle.’ in Barth-Weingarten, D., Reber, E., Selting, M. (Eds.), *Prosody in Interaction*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.