Discourse particles in Mayan Languages

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Glottothèque: Mayan languages
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Introduction

- In this lecture, I will aim to achieve the following goals:
  1. Briefly introduce discourse particles, highlighting their semantic and formal properties
  2. Survey the properties of discourse particles in Mayan languages
  3. Highlight two interesting interactions that discourse particles display based on my recent work in Yucatec Maya:
     - Interaction with clause type/illocutionary mood (AnderBois (2018) on mirative *bakáan*)
     - Interaction with intonation (AnderBois (2022) on negative epistemic *wal*)

Discourse particles

What are discourse particles?

▶ **Discourse particles** are closed-class elements which contribute epistemic, social, evidential, or discourse/procedural information (as opposed to truth conditional).

▶ Attempts to formally define the category cross-linguistically have been largely fruitless, but typical formal properties include:

  1. Linear position determined prosodically at the clausal level or above
  2. May or must be unstressed
  3. Invariant form, e.g. does not agree with subject
  4. Meaning does not co-vary with linear position

▶ Within a language, we can say more, e.g. German particles in the Mittelfeld, Tagalog particles second position or final.

Particles in natural speech

► Particles very common in naturalistic speech in Mayan lgs:

24	a;	y-u'nan		ta k'el-el	kik	mi x-Ø-k'ot	li ok'ob	cha'ej=

24   a;   y-u'nan   ta k'el-el   kik   mi x-Ø-k'ot   li   ok'ob   cha'ej=
       A3-cause+EVID PREP see-NMLZ EVID Q ASP-B3-arrive ART tomorrow day_after
       One must just wait and see if perhaps it rains tomorrow or the next day.

26   p;   puta y-u'un   ja'   ta   k'el-el
       EXPL A3-cause !   PREP   see-NMLZ
       Damn, one just has to see.

27   a;   y-u'n   me   un
       A3-cause EVID CL
       That's right.

28   p;   ja' yu'van
       ! EVID
       Yes, indeed.
         [

29   a;   jii
         Yes
         Yes.

30   p;   puta   y-u'un   xa.   tz-k'an   vo'   bi   a'a
       EXPL   A3-cause already ICP+A3-want water EVID EVID
       Damn, it really does want rain, eh?

31   a;   y-u'n   me   tz-k'an   un
       A3-cause EVID ICP+A3-want CL
       Yes, it really does.

(Haviland (2017), Zinacantán Tsotsil)

Particles in Tsotsil

Haviland (2004) on Tsotsil

▶ Non-exhaustive sample from Haviland (2004)'s work on Zinacantán Tsotsil:

Initial	2nd Position	Final
an 'why'	*xa* 'already'	*bi* 'indeed!'
ku 'so it's that way'	*no* 'just'	*kik* 'perhaps'
ya 'why not?'	*nan* 'perhaps'	*che'e* 'pues, as expected'
tzal 'why?'	*la* 'they say'	*un* 'pues, period'
solel 'only (surprisingly)'	*me* 'I say'	*yu'van* 'clearly'
mi Interrogative	*ka* 'indeed'	*-a'a* 'indeed, I agree'

(1) An   yu'un **me**   chopol un   a'a.
     Why because Intens bad   then Agree
     '(Responding to what you just said) the fact is that (I myself really think)
     it is bad, then, (agreeing with you, and I knew it all along)'

Particles in Mayan lgs

Patterns across Mayan languages

► While there is substantial variation even within Mayan languages, some commonalities emerge:

► At a general level:
  ► Relatively ineffable/hard to translate
  ► Second position common though other positions attested
  ► Often occur across sentence types

► At a specific level:
  ► Common particles include: Reportatives, Emphatics/Assuratives, Uncertainty, Temporal particles 'still'/'already', Interrogative, Miratives

Discourse particles in Yucatec

- Yucatec Maya has comparatively few discourse particles and their position is far more flexible than those in Tsotsil
  - Though some have preferred positions, they may occur at more or less any prosodic word boundary

Form(s)	Gloss	Preferred Position
bin	REPORTATIVE	2nd position
bakáan	MIRATIVE	2nd position
wal . . . -e'	'maybe, watch out'	Final (before clitics)
wáa(j)	POLARQ	2nd position
%lo'obal	FRUSTRATIVE	Final (before clitics)
túun	'then'	2nd position
xan	'too'	2nd position

Two Yucatec Maya case studies

1. Mirative/revelative *bakáan* (AnderBois (2018))
   - Interactions with sentence type
2. Epistemic and negative meanings of *wal* (AnderBois (2022))
   - Interactions with intonation

Case study 1: bakáan

Mirativity: grammatical encoding of surprise

▶ **Mirativity** refers roughly speaking to the linguistic expression of new surprising information.

▶ Inferential evidentials across many languages can be used to express this (cf. English *looks like*)

▶ But, there are also dedicated mirative particles like YM *bakáan* (cf. English *oh*?)

(2) **Context:** We are in the library which is very large, so we can't hear outside. You look up and suddenly see hail outside and say:

Táan **bakáan** u k'áaxal bat.
PROG MIR 3sg fall hail
'**Oh,** it's hailing!'

What does 'mirative' mean?

5 notions

▶ Aikhenvald (2012)'s survey article lists the following 5 different notions of mirativity:

1. 'new information'
2. 'sudden revelation or realization'
3. 'surprise'
4. 'counterexpectation'
5. 'unprepared mind'

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▶ AnderBois (2018): *bakáan* encodes 2 – sudden revelation.
   ▶ Evidence from its felicity in:
      1. Contexts where an expectation is suddenly met
      2. Context of sudden remembering

Bakáan beyond declaratives

▶ Thus far we've seen *bakáan* used to express a sudden revelation about *information*.

▶ What about imperatives and interrogatives then?

(3) **Context:** My friend is about to tell a secret of mine which I told him. I had meant to tell him not to say anything to anyone, but forgot and now that the conversation is on a related topic, I say to him:

Mik   bakáan a   wa'al   ti'   mix-máak!
ADMON Mir   A2   say.SUBJ PREP no-person
'Oh yeah, don't tell anyone!'   [Imperative]

Bakáan beyond declaratives

▶ Thus far we've seen *bakáan* used to express a sudden revelation about *information*.

▶ What about imperatives and interrogatives then?

(4) **Context:** You told me something earlier about work, but I got distracted and forgot.

Ba'ax t-a wa'alaj bakáan?
what PFV-A2 say MIR
'Oh (wait), what did you say?'   [Interrogative]

Bakáan beyond declaratives

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(4) **Context:** You told me something earlier about work, but I got distracted and forgot.

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'Oh (wait), what did you say?' [Interrogative]

▶ **Conclusion:** the revelation *bakáan* encodes concerns the speech act update encoded.

Case study 2: wal

▶ Dictionaries define *wal* as an epistemic possibility modal: 'quizás', 'maybe', 'might':

(5) **Scenario:** A woman is selling a new kind of chile she has not tried:
Le iik-o' jach páap **wal**=e'
DEF chile-DIST very spicy **wal**=TOPIC
'This chile **might** be spicy.'

▶ (we set aside here *wal*'s interaction with sentence type, see AnderBois 2022)

Negative evaluative uses of wal

▶ In contrast to the preceding example, however, we also uses where *wal* doesn't appear to contribute uncertainty:

(6) Yan k k'e'eyel wale' –ki ko'ox.
yan k k'e'ey–el **wal**=e' –ki. ko'ox
FUT A1PL punish:PASS–STATUS wal=TOP QUOT go:HORT
'We're going to be punished!' he said. Let's go!'

▶ Rather, it communicates a warning or other negative affect on the part of the speaker.

▶ Unlike apprehensional modals in other lgs (Faller et al. t.a.), however, we do not find both meaning components at once
  ▶ i.e. there is no uncertainty in (6) and no negative affect in (5)

Differentiating the uses of wal

- AnderBois 2022: these two meanings arise due to intonation:
  - **Unstressed wal:** epistemic possibility
  - **Stressed wal:** negative affect

(7) **Uncertainty context:** A Yucatecan woman is selling chiles to a gringo. Since she is local and works at the market, she normally knows the chiles, but this time she has a new variety she does not know. It looks like it could be spicy, but since it's new, she is unsure.

Le   iik=o'   jach páap **wal**=e'
DEF chile=DIST very spicy **wal**$_{uns}$=TOP
'Maybe this chile is spicy.'

- Notably, the intonational mechanism of deaccenting is not otherwise meaningful in YM.

Differentiating the uses of wal

▶ AnderBois 2022: these two meanings arise due to intonation:
  ▶ **Unstressed wal:** epistemic possibility
  ▶ **Stressed wal:** negative affect

(8) **Warning context:** A local woman is at the market, selling chiles to a gringo. Since she is local, she knows all the types of chiles very well. Since the customer is not local, she gives him the warning

Le   iik=o'   jach páap **WAL**=e'
DEF chile=DIST very spicy **wal**$_{str}$=TOP
'Watch out, this chile is spicy.'

▶ Notably, the intonational mechanism of deaccenting is not otherwise meaningful in YM.

Conclusions

▶ In this lecture, we've seen that Mayan languages have a range of discourse particles.

▶ We've considered two case studies from Yucatec Maya: *bakáan* and *wal*

▶ Important interactions with:
  ▶ Sentence type
  ▶ Intonation

▶ In addition to their intrinsic interest, discourse particles may shed light on these other elements as well

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