Documentation Materials and Linguistic Analysis—A study of the “conjunct/disjunct” system in Tsafiki

In this paper I will demonstrate how materials from a large scale, collaborative documentation project of Tsafiki (a Barbacoan language spoken in the western foothills of the Andes) were essential in the linguistic analysis of one of the language’s core grammatical systems.

Tsafiki has what is sometimes called a conjunct/disjunct system. These systems have been described as binary person alignment systems which exhibit a first person subject versus second/third person contrast in declarative clauses and a second person subject versus first/third person contrast in interrogatives. In addition the conjunct form occurs when the subject of a speech verb is co-referential with the subject of its complement clause and the disjunct suffix elsewhere (Hale, 1980).

Elicited declarative clauses in Tsafiki seem to abide by the above definition as illustrated in the example below.

1. **Declaratives**
   a. *ji-yo-e*  
      go-CNGR-DCL  
      ‘I went.’
   b. *ji-e*  
      go-DCL  
      ‘You/he/she went.’

However in interrogatives there is now a three-way distinction.

2. **Questions**
   a. *seke tera ki-i-n*  
      well step DO-NCL-NCNGR-INT  
      ‘Did I dance well?’
   b. *seke tera ki-yo-n*  
      well dance DO-CNGR-INT  
      ‘Did you dance well?’
   c. *seke tera ki-n*  
      well dance DO-INT  
      ‘Did she/he dance well?’

There are further problems when natural data is examined. In this paper, I use a corpus-based quantitative analysis based on an annotated, 300,000 word database. As shown in Table 1 below, any of the above suffixes, -yo/-i/0 can occur with any person in both interrogative and declarative clauses. Declarative clauses with first person subjects occur 35% of the time without -yo and although extremely rare -yo also occurs in clauses with both 2nd and 3rd person subjects. These
occurrences cannot be dismissed in that speakers readily accept these forms. There is also an extremely statistically significant (p < 0.0001) difference between clauses with first person singular vs. first person plural.

Table 1. The distribution of –yo, i/yA and 0 in declarative clauses with 1st, 2nd and 3rd person nominative subjects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1S</th>
<th>1PL</th>
<th>2S</th>
<th>2PL</th>
<th>3S</th>
<th>3PL</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DCL 0</td>
<td>659</td>
<td>922</td>
<td>549</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>15602</td>
<td>7254</td>
<td>25117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCL -yo</td>
<td>2234</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3037</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DCL -i</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>2984</td>
<td>1804</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>15651</td>
<td>7317</td>
<td>28447</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, I turn to discourse analysis, which leads to the conclusion that the odd distribution of these suffixes can be explained by their role in coding the epistemic status of both speaker and hearer.

While this paper discusses the Tsafiki conjunct/disjunct system, the focus is on the process. With the new technologies available to us and by using collaborative documentation, linguists now have the ability to create large corpora of natural data. In this study I try to show both the advantages and disadvantages of elicitation, quantitative studies and discourse analysis as well as how by a process of triangulation, i.e. comparing the results of each method, a deeper understanding of linguistic structure can be obtained.