

Some "discourse particles" in the Tłıchǵ language

Leslie Saxon, Brittney O'Neill, and Erika Van Vliet
University of Victoria

- the goal of this presentation is to talk about how certain "small words" termed **discourse particles** add to the meanings of sentences in the Tłıchǵ language
- I would like to thank the great number of people who have helped me understand what I know about this beautiful and expressive language

1. Introduction

- **discourse** is conversation or exchanges of language, including stories, speeches, written language, or other forms of verbal expression longer than just one sentence
 - using **discourse particles**, speakers can express something about the relationship of their sentences to what is true
 - ***is the speaker sure or not sure that it is true?***
 - ***does the speaker have evidence if it is true or not?***
 - ***is the speaker trying to convince listeners about the truth of the sentence?***
 - ***does the speaker want to make the sentence true somehow?***
 - ***is the speaker asking about the truth of the sentence or about the listeners' knowledge?***
- people in a discourse build on common understanding to share **more** that they know

Sharing more of what we know

- to share information, it is important for the discourse participants to signal to each other what they understand about the *truth* of sentences; discourse particles can play an important part in this language function
- discourse particles in Dene languages have been studied by Gary Holton, Olga Lovick, Keren Rice, Siri Tuttle, Mary Willie, Nicholas Welch, Robert Young, and others

Examples of discourse particles in English

1. **They are from Gamètì.**
2. **They are from Gamètì, eh?**
3. **They are from, like, Gamètì.**
4. **They are from Gamètì, right?**



- as we see with these examples from English, it can be challenging sometimes to figure out or express exactly what a discourse particle adds to a conversation, because:
 - (a) the meaning is abstract, and
 - (b) the meaning is relational to the people talking and the truth of the sentence.

Examples of discourse particles in the Tłjchq language

<i>Tłjchq sentence</i>	<i>Approximate English translation</i>
5. Lèt'è dẹnagedì.	'They forgot bread'
6. Lèt'è dẹnagedì nqò.	'They forgot bread (so it seems)'
7. Asì lèt'è dẹnagedì ?	'Did they forget bread?'
8. Lèt'è dẹnagedì nì ?	'Did they forget bread? (I think I know)'

2. Tentative Conclusions

(based on looking at written forms of the Tłjchq language only)

- there are some discourse particles that mark sentences as **questions** or **wishes**. (Interestingly, by their nature questions and wishes are not true or false.)
- the **discourse particles link with different types of verbs** in complex sentences. This helps clarify the meanings of the particles and how they relate to what is considered true.
- there seem to be types of expressions speakers can use **when they are presuming the truth of certain sentences**, and the discourse particles help us to understand the process: **for future study!**



3. Sources of information for this research

• the examples in this presentation come from the translation of the Bible done by Tł̥chq̇ language experts Mary Siemens, Marie Louise Bouvier, Francis Zoe, and others (Canadian Bible Society 2008). I would like to do further studies to find out if spoken language use is the same or different.

4. Background

• in all languages, 'true' or 'false' only apply to some types of sentences (Austin 1962)

<i>Person A says:</i>	<i>Person B responds:</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>They aren't here.</i>	<i>That's true.</i>	Sentences like this have a truth value.
<i>It is raining.</i>	<i>That can't be true!</i>	Sentences like this have a truth value.
<i>It might rain.</i>	<i>That's true.</i>	Sentences like this have a truth value.
<i>I cooked supper.</i>	<i>Tell the truth!</i>	Sentences like this have a truth value.
<i>Are they here?</i>	<i>*That's true.</i>	Sentences like this don't have a truth value.
<i>What did she cook?</i>	<i>*That's not true.</i>	Sentences like this don't have a truth value.
<i>Open a window.</i>	<i>*That's true.</i>	Sentences like this don't have a truth value.

5. Some discourse particles in Tł̥chq̇: a short catalogue of 5 items

5.1. Questions with **asj̥** – questioning, expecting an answer 'yes' or 'no'

9. **asj̥** wek'è̥zq̇?

Q 2sS.300.know

'do you know it/him/her?' Matthew 15:12

10. **asj̥** hoehnè ha d̥i-le?

Q 3S.win Fut impossible-Neg

'can he win?' Luke 14:31

11. [**asjì** Paul ehkw'i gode] gıwq̄ ...
 Q rightly 3S.speak 3pS.want
 'they wondered [whether Paul spoke truthfully]' Acts 17:11

5.2. Questions with nì – questioning, when speakers think they know the answer
 → as usual with discourse articles, the use of this particle is hard to understand without context

12. Nı Zezì wecheekeè anet'e-le **nì** ?
 2s Jesus 3.disciple 2sS.be-Neg FQ
 'Aren't you a disciple of Jesus?' Luke 22:17

13. Gonezq̄-le anejà **nì** ?
 2sS.be_smart-Neg 2sS.became FQ
 'Have you gone crazy?' Acts 12:15



nì – always used to form a direct question, even when attached to **part** of a sentence

14. **eyı nì** ıt'e ?
 that FQ 3S.be
 'Is he that one?' John 9:8

15. **Tł'o k'ewechts'i ghàahda ha nì** aaht'ı?
 grass 3S.blow around 2pS.watch Fut FQ 2pS.doing
 'Are you doing that to watch grass blowing in the wind?' Matthew 11: 7

5.3. Negative wishes/commands with **sòò** – speaking against things happening

→ this discourse particle is sometimes termed 'prohibitive': speakers express the wish that something not happen. Someone could understand the speaker as saying not to do something.

16. Naxɪdzeè yìì hoḥḥ awede sòò.
2p.heart inside sin 3S.Opt.be Prohib
'Let there be no sin in your hearts' Mark 14:31

17. ... edeghọyaah?à sòò.
Refl.2pS.deceive Prohit
'... don't deceive yourselves' 1 Corinthians 3:18

5.4. Uncertainty **sọn1** – 'maybe': speakers aren't sure that what they are saying is true

18. Bò dẹ nàgeet'ì ha sọn1 ...
meat without 3pS.fall_down Fut Uncert
'They might fall down with hunger' Matthew 15:32

→ this discourse particle can be used alone as a single word in answering a question, meaning something like 'I don't know' or 'I wonder'



- when this particle is used in questions, speakers seem to express uncertainty about what the answer to the question could be

19. *Asì eyı Christ at'ı sɔnı ?*
Q that 3S.be Uncert
 'Is that [person] Christ, I wonder?' John 4:29

5.5. Highlighting evidence for statements *nɔ̀* – "evidential" particle

→ speakers using this discourse particle aren't expressing absolute certainty about the statement, but are saying that there is evidence for the statement

- often in translations this particle isn't translated at all

20. *Wecheekè ìt'è dɛnagedì nɔ̀.*
3.disciple bread 3pS.forget Evid
 His disciples had forgotten bread. Mark 8:14

21. "Dıı dɔ ehkw'ı eda ɟlè *nɔ̀*," hadı.
this person right 3S.live Past Evid 3S.say
 'He said, "Surely this person was living right"' Luke 23:47



5.6. Summary

asì asking a question 'yes' or 'no' about a statement

nì asking a question 'yes' or 'no', while thinking you know the answer

sòò expressing the wish that something not happen (at times, a negative command)

sòn1 expressing uncertainty about whether the statement is true: 'maybe'

nòò expressing the fact that there is evidence for the statement

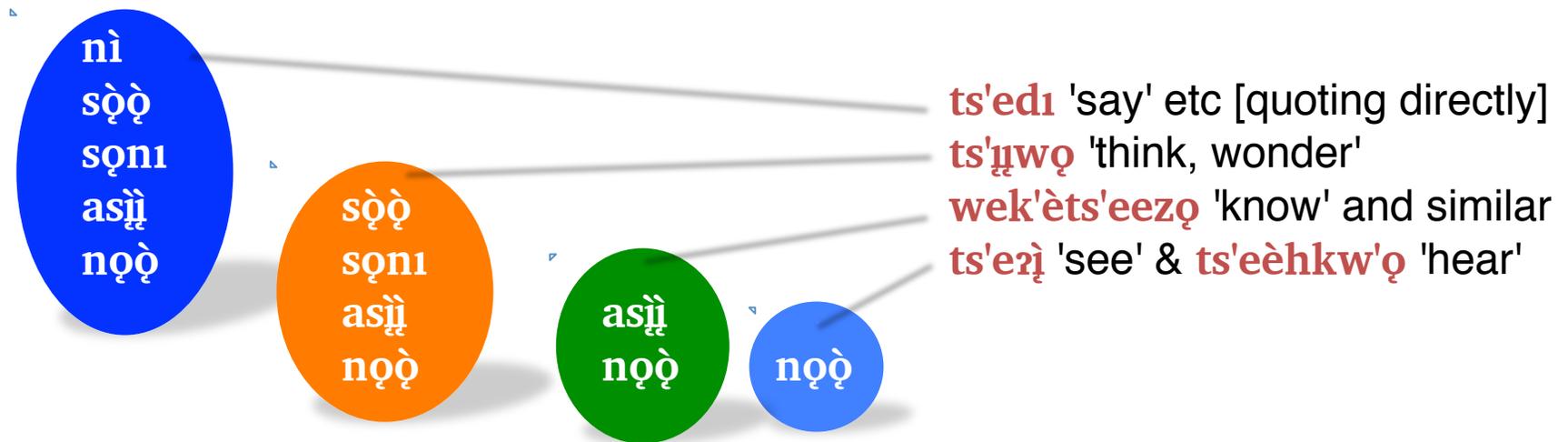
- there are quite a number of discourse particles besides these: **for future study**
- except for **asì**, these particles come at the end of their phrase
- except for **sòn1**, these particles can't stand alone without another phrase
- Nicholas Welch has also discussed some of these same particles in new work, and we overall agree in our approaches



6. Linking discourse particles and verbs

- some of the discourse particles are closely linked to certain verbs, and I will briefly talk about this (with credits to Cinque 1999, Speas & Tenny 2003, Speas 2004, and others)

Illustrating how the different discourse particles combine with verbs



nì	asking a question 'yes' or 'no', while thinking you know the answer
sòò	expressing the wish that something not happen
sɔn1	expressing uncertainty about whether the statement is true: 'maybe'
asì	asking a question 'yes' or 'no'
nòò	expressing the fact that there is evidence for the statement

- these types of verbs are similar to the particles because, as people share knowledge, they let speakers express a relationship to the truth of an occurrence being talked about

6.1. Quoting

- quoting what other people say is an important way that we share knowledge
- **all** of these particles can be used in direct quotation as in (21) and (22).

21. “D11 dọ ehkw'1 eda ɿlè nọ̀ọ,” had1.
this person right 3S.live Past Evid 3S.say
'He said, "Surely this person was living right"' Luke 23:47

22. “... dọ wɿzì1 yek'èizà sọ̀ọ,” gòhd1.
person none_at_all 3O.3S.Opt.know Prohib 3pO.3S.say
'He told them, "Let no one at all know it..."' Matthew 9:30



6.2. Evaluating

- evaluating what other people say is another way that we share understanding

- **some** of the particles can be used with the important verb **ts'ɿwọ**, which translates as 'think, wonder', showing our mental evaluation of a situation

asì1 ... + **ts'ɿwọ** someone is wondering if a situation is true or false

... sọ̀ọ + **ts'ɿwọ** someone is thinking that a situation had better not happen

... sọ̀n1 + **ts'ɿwọ** someone is thinking or wondering about a situation without knowing

... nọ̀ọ + **ts'ɿwọ** someone thinks a situation is true from evidence



23. **Asìì Paul ehkw'i gode** **gìwọ** ...
Q rightly 3S.speak 3pS.want
 '... they wondered whether Paul spoke truthfully' Acts 17:11

24. **Dọ ... naxìghọyagurà sọ̀ò** **dehwhọ** ...
person 2pO.3pS.Opt.deceive Prohib 1sS.think
 'I think that people had better not deceive you [pl] ...' Luke 23:47

25. **Dọ xè naetle sọ̀n1** **gìwọ**.
people with 3S.walking Uncert 3pS.think
 'They thought that he was walking with the people' Luke 2:44

26. **Eyit'à asìì John-Baptist eyi at'ì sọ̀n1** **gìwọ**.
so Q that 3S.be Uncert 3pS.think
 'So they were wondering if John the Baptist was the one' Luke 3:15

27. **Sarayi g1a?ù ekò ts'èko siì wèdaat'ì nọ̀ò** **gìwọ**.
3O.3pS.saw when woman very3.beautiful Evid 3pS.think
 'When they saw Sarayi they thought she was a very beautiful woman' Genesis 12:14

28. **Moses wenàowoò k'èè ìda nọ̀ò** **negùhwhọ ha.**
3.law according_to 2sS.live Evid 2sO.3pS.think Fut
 'They are going to think you are living according to Moses' laws ...' Acts 21:24

6.3. (Mental) testing, discovery, recognition

→ we share understanding also through the results of (mental) testing, discovery, and recognition

- **two** of these particles can be linked with verbs expressing these concepts

asjì ... + *V [testing; knowing]*

... nọ̀ọ̀ + *V [testing; knowing]*

29. **Asjì** naxıgha ehkw'ı-ahodı k'èè aahda gha ededaàniahdè.
Q 2p.for truly_spoken according_to 2pS.live for Refl.2pS.examine
'Examine yourselves to see whether you are living according to faith' 2 Cor 13:5
30. **Asjì** k'egedlı ha dı̀-le geèhdzà ha ...
Q 3pS.pull Fut possible 3pS.test Fut
'... they are going to test whether [the oxen] can pull ...' Luke 14:19
31. ... **asjì** Nọ̀htsı wedahxà gohde ... yek'èezọ ha họt'e.
Q God 3.on_authority 1sS.speak 3O.3S.know must
'He must know whether I am speaking on the authority of God ...' John 7:17
32. **asjì** ehkw'ı agedıı sı̀ı wek'èhoedzọ̀ agele ha dı̀.
Q rightly 3pS.say.Nom Foc 3OO.be_known.Adv 3pS.cause Fut cannot
'They couldn't make it known whether they spoke truthfully' Acts 25:7

33.

... ɪht'edɛ	geèhkw'e	nɔ̀
-------------	----------	-----

gɪk'èhoèhzà.
naked 3pS.sit Evid 3pS.knew
 '... they realized that they were ["sat"] naked' Genesis 3:7

34.

... godeè	adɪ	nɔ̀
-----------	-----	-----

nàgeèhzhì.
3S.speak 3S.say Evid 3pS.recognized
 'they recognized [what] he meant to say' Matthew 16:12

→ in the vast majority of cases, there is no discourse particle in the context of **wek'èts'eezɔ** 'know'

35. K'àowo,

ehkw'ɪ	zɔ	goɪde
--------	----	-------

wek'èts'eezɔ.
lord truthfully only 2sS.speak 3O.1pS.know
 'Lord, we know you only speak truthfully' Mark 12:14



6.4. Sensory experience

→ we derive our knowledge also from our physical senses.

- **one** of the discourse particles combines in sentences expressing knowledge gained from sensory experiences.

... nọ̀ + *V [sensory experience]*



36.

hòt'a	ełajwo	ı̀lè	nọ̀	gıaɿı ...
<i>already</i>	<i>3S.died</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Evid</i>	<i>3pS.saw</i>

'they saw that he had already died' John 19:33

37.

nakwenàoɿɿo	Isaiah	wenıhtı̀è	k'eyahtı	nọ̀	yeèhkw'ɿ, ...
<i>prophet</i>		<i>3.book</i>	<i>3S.read</i>	<i>Evid</i>	<i>3O.3S.hear</i>

'He heard [him] reading the book of the prophet Isaiah' Acts 8:30

7. Ending

→ the goal of this presentation has been to talk about how certain "small words" termed **discourse particles** add to the meanings of sentences in the Tłıchǫ language

- using **discourse particles**, speakers can express something about the relationship of their sentences to what is true
- because truth is important, it is important to study these particles
- my source here is a translation of the bible; while I believe that the translators did a great job of conveying the meaning of the stories, what about other types of discourse in the Tłıchǫ language: advice, different types of stories, speeches, jokes, conversations, and more?
- and it would be great to see how other discourse particles are used!

e.g. **là** this discourse particle seems to express surprise about the event

38. Hanìkò Zezì wecheekeè edemǫǫ k'egeetǫ **là**
but Jesus 3.disciple Refl.around 3pS.look_around DP

dǫ wı̀zìı ǵıaǵı-le, Zezì zǫ ǵıaǵı.
person none_at-all 3sO.3pS.saw-Neg Jesus only 3sO.3pS.saw

Suddenly, when [Jesus' disciples] looked around, they no longer saw anyone with them except Jesus. Mark 9:8

Masìcho!

