

## **The Boruca Verbal Dimension<sup>1</sup>**

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### **0. Introduction**

The present paper offers a description of the verb in Boruca. In the first section it describes the main features exhibited by verbs in this language; special attention is given to the existence of infinitives in this Chibchan language. The second section deals with TAM (tense/aspect/mood) features. Particularly important here is the discussion pertaining to the existence of tense or aspect in Boruca; new light is shed on this topic and the analysis points to the idea that the language cannot be assumed to be a tense language. The last two sections deal with verb structure and valence-adjusting operations respectively.

The Boruca indigenous group is located in the southern part of Costa Rica, in an area known as Buenos Aires, in the province of Puntarenas. The people are found mainly in two reserves: Boruca and Curré and the total number of members on these reservations is 2017

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<sup>1</sup> Given the state of the language, the author has relied primarily on these secondary sources, complemented by examples of sentences produced by Nemesio González, one of the last semi-speakers of the language. Only when examples are taken from secondary sources is their respective citation given; examples with no reference citation correspond to Nemesio's production and were collected by the author of this article.

inhabitants;<sup>2</sup> only two of them are semi-speakers of Boruca; the rest of them use Spanish as their first language, hence placing Boruca at an even higher risk of extinction. Regarding the genetic affiliation of the language, Boruca is a Chibchan language. This family originally occupied the territories of the present-day Costa Rican-Panama border zone, along the Talamanca mountain range. According to Quesada (2007: 31-40), the Chibchan family is a large language family that is now distributed along the countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, most of Costa Rica, and areas of Panama, Colombia and Venezuela. The Chibchan family is divided into the Paya and the Southern languages. The latter in turn are divided into the Pota, Isthmian and Magdalenian languages. Boruca comes from the Isthmian branch and, like Teribe and Cuna, has no immediate sister languages. According to Quesada (2007), the other members of the Isthmian branch are Bribri and Cabécar (in the Viceita branch), Guaymí and Bocotá (in the Guaymian branch) and the deceased Chánguena and Dorasque (in the Doracic branch). Except for the Cunas and the members of the Doracic branch, the rest of languages are spoken in Costa Rican territory (plus the Guatuso, from the Pota group).<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Verbs and verbal morphology

In mainstream linguistics, there is a general consensus about the cross-linguistic existence of two large lexical classes: nouns and verbs. In Boruca, as in any other language, the class of verbs is the word class whose members express the most time-variable concepts. Verbs then, occupy one end of the time stability continuum, while nouns are placed at the other end of this continuum, as the most time-stable concepts. Despite the existence of a marker for infinitive, there is no other readily recognisable morphology in Boruca; thus verbs cannot be divided into morphological classes. Boruca differs in this respect from languages such as Spanish, which has a very clear morphological classification of verbs according to their endings: *ar*, *er*, *ir*; or from Teribe, a close relative of Boruca, which has a clear semantic and morphosyntactic classification (Quesada 2000: 63) between a. [+static], positional verbs; and b. [-static] -transitive, movement and plain verbs or +transitive verbs, on the basis of the morphology expressing perfective aspect (Quesada 2000: 64). In Boruca, verbs are recognisable on only semantic and syntactic grounds. Semantically, verbs are the most time-variable concepts expressing states,

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<sup>2</sup> INEC. Instituto Nacional en Estadística y Censo. *Censo 2000*.

<sup>3</sup> For further, detailed information, see Quesada (2007).

processes, actions and events; syntactically, they are the heads of verb phrases, they code events in texts, and they are the elements that appear in sentence final position.<sup>4</sup> Although Boruca does not have a morphology that allows the mapping of certain classes of verbs, it is still possible to find prototypical verbs of state, action and process. Some of the prototypical state verbs in Boruca are *tsá'* ('be cold'), *jióng* ('be hot'), *jri'ká* ('be alive'), *kohtká* (be dead); some prototypical process verbs are *koht* ('die'), *tura'* ('rot'), *uh* ('melt'), *kwik* ('dance'), *tabájeng* ('sing'), *tek* ('speak') and *kap* ('sleep'); some action verbs are *ái'* ('kill'), *báht* ('hit'), and *shité'* ('break').

### 1.1. Infinitives

In contrast to most Chibchan languages, Boruca has a marker for infinitives: *-í*, or its variant *-ih*; this characteristic of Boruca is worth noting and given that this is the only language in the family with this characteristic, and together with other unique features of Boruca, (such as having a definite article, for instance), it may suggest that this language represents a single member of a separate branch in the Chibchan family. Syntactically, infinitives in Boruca appear as the verbal form governed by a matrix verb. In this context, they appear immediately after the main verb of the sentence (as in (1)) or in a postpositional phrase also subordinated to a main verb (as in (2)). The presence of infinitive forms in Boruca is intermittent; in this language they sometimes appear in certain constructions while at other times they are absent in exactly the same context (see examples (3, 4) below). Future studies will determine whether this is due to a phonologically conditioned environment, as the data seem to suggest. Previous publications do not discuss the existence of infinitives, perhaps due to the intermittence of the form, or the lack of stronger evidence for its existence or even because of the moribund state of the language. Quesada Pacheco (1996) is the only author who even vaguely refers to the marker for infinitives and then glosses the stories that he collected, identifying this marker; however, he does not elaborate on the topic. In the existing Boruca literature it can be observed that infinitives are marked by the suffix *-í* or its phonetic variant *-ih*. This suffix is deleted when the TAM markers are added to the verbal string; this gives morphological evidence to its status of infinitive. Despite the existence of

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<sup>4</sup> Basic word order in Boruca, as in all the other Chibchan languages is SOV, although this is not a strict word order (as is the case in Japanese) given that Boruca allows postpositional phrases to appear in sentences final position also.

infinitives in Boruca, they do not represent the citation form<sup>5</sup>; the lematic form is given without the infinitive marker, which invites the possibility that the infinitive form is a type of inflection. Also important to bear in mind is that the marker of the infinitive is not to be confused with the 3SG or 3PL pronouns or their corresponding possessive forms (*i*). Examples (1, 2) illustrate the function of the infinitive marker; in example (2) below it is clear that the infinitive marker *-i* is different from the above mentioned pronouns (note how in this sentence the infinitive is immediately followed by a 3SG pronoun). Furthermore, although, as mentioned above, one could expect a systematic distribution of the infinitive marker, this is not the case in Boruca; after examining the data, no consistency has been found. This is clear in examples (3, 4) below; the syntactic context is similar, but the marker is present in only one example.

- (1) *jabíshe' i-ng já ta já' shon-kra já' shon-ra róhk teg-íh*  
 then 3PL-FOC<sup>6</sup> DEM in REFL gather-PNT REFL gather-ACTL PL talk-INF  
 'Then they gathered there, they gather to talk.' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 34)
- (2) *di' só' ki jót-kra di' mang porke daba-krá súhkra róhk*  
 POSS old.lady SPEC get.mad-PNT 1PL with because arrive-PNT dwarf PL  
*ki i déng ká i shúng-í i kák tá*  
 SPEC 3SG footprint to 3SG send-INF POSS town to  
 'The old lady got mad at us, because the dwarves came after her, to send her to her town.' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 38)
- (3) *ding já' sá'rá teg-í*  
 1PL-TOP REFL start-ACTL talk-INF  
 'We start to talk.' (Quesada Pacheco 1995: 88)
- (4) *í' róhk ki já' sá'-kra jí kráng saté'*  
 3PL PL TOP REFL start-PNT wood bunch light  
 'They started to light a bunch of wood.' (Quesada Pacheco 1995: 88)

<sup>5</sup> An anonymous reviewer argues that the speakers are not the ones who provide the citation forms; however, by definition, the citation form is unmarked, this is the form that an informant would produce automatically. Insofar as the infinitive is not spontaneously produced by the informants when information is being elicited, it can be taken as marked; therefore, it does not represent the citation form.

<sup>6</sup> Three markers reflect the grammaticalisation of subject coding in Boruca: *ki*, *ang* and *abí*. These forms mark noun phrases depending on their function in discourse: subject, topic, focus, emphasis, agreement to previously mentioned subject, and specificity. Thus, each one of these forms will be glossed differently throughout the paper, depending on the function observed in context.

## 1.2. Verb types

For most Chibchan languages, verb classes are not a common feature (Guaymí and Teribe are exceptions as they have different classes of verbs); Boruca verbs cannot be divided into morphological classes but, of course, its verbs can be classified according to their valence. With respect to zero valence, Boruca does not exhibit this characteristic as such (see examples in notes); weather verbs,<sup>7</sup> for instance, use the word *kák* ('day', 'sun', 'climate') as the subject of the sentence. This shows that Boruca, like Germanic languages, does not allow zero subjects. In addition, either the generic subject *abí rók*<sup>8</sup> ('people') or the reflexive pronoun *já*<sup>9</sup> is used when the subject is not defined. The TAM morphemes *-ra*, *-íra*, *-kra*, *-kirá* adhere to different predicate types: adverbial, locative, nominal, verbal or adjectival to express states and positions. Intransitive, transitive and ditransitive verbs can also be found.

### 1.2.1. State/positional verbs<sup>10</sup>

A copula, as a free form or free linking particle does not exist in Boruca, but the TAM morphemes *-ra*, *-íra*, *-kra* and *-kirá* can be added to various predicate types, as mentioned above, to partly convey this idea. Thus, verbal morphology that adheres to different word classes is used to form nominal predications; this assigns the verbal morphology a copula-like function, although, as mentioned above, in Boruca a copula form, as such, is not readily identifiable. Nominal predicates are then created by adding the verbal morphology to the constituent that is semantically the nominal predicate (5, 6); when the verbal morphology attaches to adjectives, it results in adjectival predications (7, 8). The verbal morphology (*-ra*, *-íra*, *-kra* and *-kirá*) can also be used in locational clauses (9) in Boruca, just as it is used in English; and it is part of adverbial clauses as well (10). There is no difference between any of the above types in terms of morphosyntax.

<sup>7</sup> *kra'é'i-r-i-ng wíkta kák ki dujdé'-kra*  
observe-ACTL-3SG-AGR while day SUBJ get.dark-PNT  
'He observed, while the night came.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 92)

<sup>8</sup> *ora abi rók ki i dóh-gra bo-í*  
now person PL SUBJ 3SG hear-PNT cry-INF  
'Now people hear him cry.'

<sup>9</sup> *wá ki já' jua-grá Boruca ta*  
DEM SPEC REFL say-PNT Boruca in  
'This is said in Boruca.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 74)

<sup>10</sup> The TAM status of these forms will be discussed in more detail in future studies. Traditionally, they have been considered a cliticised form; however, there is strong possibility that they represent a free form instead.

- (5) *bá ki á'd be-rá*  
2SG TOP POSS mother-ACTL  
'You are my mother.' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 77)
- (6) *í' róhk ki bú'k kabát róhk-íra*  
3PL PL TOP two brother PL-DUR  
'They were two brothers.' (Literally: 'They, two brothers, were.')
- (7) *ógé kahkshí-ra já ki kangkwá's ki ang*  
all open-ACTL that TOP stone DEF FOC  
'That stone is all open.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 66)
- (8) *í' róhk ki duríh róhk moréng-íra*  
3PL PL TOP wizards PL nice-DUR  
'They, the wizards were nice.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 74)
- (9) *wá ki Isla Caña tá-ra*  
DEM TOP Isla Cañas in-ACTL  
'That is in Isla Cañas.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 100)
- (10) *ihchí i-ng ya'shi-krá*  
and 3SG-FOC like.that-PNT  
'And it was like that.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 84)

### 1.2.2. Intransitive

Intransitive verbs are only identifiable syntactically as the verbs that require a single argument. These verbs "describe[s] a property, state, or situation involving only one participant" (Payne 1997: 170). See (11) - (14). The word order is SV, as shown in ((11), (14)) with an alternative V<sub>S</sub> order as in (12).

- (11) *mang i-ng de-krá róhk i déng ka*  
then 3SG-TOP go-PNT PL 3SG behind to  
'Then they went behind him.' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 80)
- (12) *de-kr-i-ng de-kr-i-ng de-kr-i-ng asta k-i-ng*  
walk-PNT-3SG-TOP walk-PNT-3SG-TOP walk-PNT-3SG-TOP until that-3SG-TOP  
*daba-krá róhk é'tsi néngkra sa'ñu'eng*  
arrive-PNT PL NUM road ugly  
'He walked and walked and walked until he arrived to an ugly road.'
- (13) *dí mang dabag-rá*  
who with come-ACTL  
'With whom (does he) come?' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 80)
- (14) *i-ng tú's-krá iné tebek tsít róhk ki raht-krá*  
3sg-TOP explode-PNT and snake DIM PL SPEC come.out-PNT  
'It exploded and the little snakes came out.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 56)

### 1.2.3. Transitive

Transitive verbs in Boruca are identified as the verbs that have two arguments. According to Payne (1997: 171), they are verbs that “describe[s] a relation between two participants such that one of the participants acts toward or upon the other.” As is the case in English, regardless of the degree of transitivity, such relations between two participants are usually coded as transitive relations in Boruca. The word order is SOV with an alternative OV<sub>S</sub> order as in (17).<sup>11</sup>

- (15) *e'tsi ramróhk ki é'tsi kóngróhk ki bejáng-kra*  
 one woman TOP NUM man DEF love-PNT  
 ‘A woman loved a man.’ (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 45)
- (16) *at kóngát ki á'r ísht-kra néngkra tá*  
 POSS husband SPEC POSS see-PNT road in  
 ‘My husband saw me on the road.’ (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 94)
- (17) *jí' ki tóh-kr-i-ng róh*  
 wood TOP lite-PNT-3PL-TOP PL  
 ‘They lit the wood.’ (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 56)
- (18) *ógé i-ng tebek tsít róhk ki ái'-kra.*  
 all 3PL-TOP snake DIM PL SPEC kill-PNT  
 ‘They all killed the little snakes.’ (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 56)

### 1.2.4. Ditransitive

Along the lines discussed above, ditransitive verbs are those verbs that describe a relation between three core participants; that is, they require three nuclear arguments. In Boruca, they require an obligatory postposition to include the third argument of the verb in the sentence.

- (19) *a-ng ba jét báhkang só't ki wí'-kra*  
 1SG-FOC 2SG for four bluegill SPEC bring-PNT  
 ‘I brought you the four bluegill.’ (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 64)

<sup>11</sup> Boruca personal pronouns

Singular	1	<i>át</i>	Plural	1	<i>dí',dí' róhk</i>
	2	<i>bá</i>		2	<i>bí',bí' róhk</i>
	3	<i>i</i>		3	<i>i róhk, i' róhk</i>

In Boruca the personal pronouns can sometimes be used as indexed suffixes in running discourse. See the example below with a 1SG marking on the verb.

*daba-kr-a-ng dí' tsasúh róhk kába*  
 arrive-PFV-1SG-TOP POSS grandparent PL place  
 ‘I arrived to my grandparents place.’

- (20) *já ta i-ng suá ki shúng-ra róhk*  
 that in 3PL-FOC shrimp SPEC send-ACTL PL  
*só't ki shúng-ra róhk i be kí jet*  
 bluegill SPEC send-ACTL PL POSS mother SPEC for  
 'In that, they send shrimp, (they) send bluegill for their mother.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 68)

## 2. TAM system

### 2.1. Time versus aspect

According to Quesada (2007: 68), Chibchan languages are rich in TAM systems, and in Central America, tense seems to be the least salient of all systems. It is present in Buglere, Guaymí, Paya, Rama, Cuna and Guatuso. Traditionally Boruca has been considered a tense language. Constenla & Maroto (1986) and Quesada Pacheco (1995, 1996) argue that Boruca has a tense system. According to Constenla & Maroto (1986), Boruca has a system with two verb series. In the first series, these authors include the markers presented in Figure 1 below and also their corresponding negative forms. In the second series, they include a group of non-obligatory suffixes that precede the first series' markers; such markers include *-ah* ('already'), *-krog* ('finish'), *-cha* ('want'), *-mang* ('use to'), and *-ishkong* ('have to'). Quesada Pacheco (1995, 1996) does not refer to a "series of verbs," instead he treats Constenla's first and second series separately, but still the so-called second series is related to time constituency in his view. Reference to Constenla's latter series will be made below; for now, their tense system for the first series will be represented schematically as in Fig. 1.

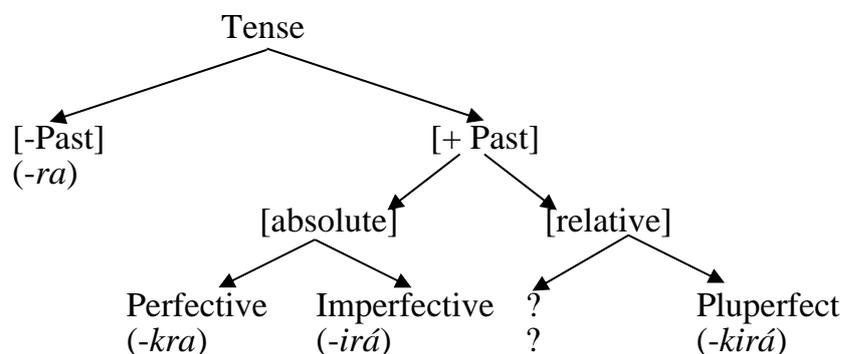


Figure 1. Tense distribution in Boruca according to Constenla & Maroto (1986).

One aspect in favour of the above proposal is that Constenla and Maroto (1986) and Quesada Pacheco's (1995, 1996) argumentation for one

marker for present/future and three markers for past are sanctioned correspondingly in texts many times. The following examples fit the pattern proposed by these authors; see (21) for present, (22) for perfective and imperfective, and (23) for pluperfect.

- (21) *bá ki só't ki tú'-ra*  
 2SG TOP fish SPEC eat-PRS  
 'Do you eat fish?' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 64)
- (22) *j-ab-uge' í'k i-ng rahd-írá ki é'*  
 DEM-EMPH-for when 3SG-TOP leave-IPFV TOP then  
*é'tse abí ki kwíng i duas-kirá i chenkuá ta*  
 one person FOC lots 3SG hit-PRFV POSS back in.  
 'For that same one, when he was leaving, one person hit him on his back.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 102)
- (23) *shi-kr-í-ng i tegi e'de k-í-ng drik shosát reshí isht-kíra*  
 return-PRFV-3SG-TOP POSS story with that-3SG-TOP metal painted only see-PLUP  
 'He returned with his story that he had seen the painted metal.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 102)

Appealing as the above presented proposal may be, it still has a number of flaws. To begin with, Constenla and Maroto (1986) and Quesada Pacheco's (1995, 1996) view (henceforth the Tense Hypothesis/ TH) is evidently lacking symmetry. It proposes a pluperfect tense marked by the suffix *-kirá*; however, there is no marker for a present perfect in this time line. This situation is very unusual in world's languages and is made explicit by the gap observed in Figure 1 above. Furthermore, it is observed that the alleged system is not purely temporal given that it includes basic aspectual oppositions, as in the case of *-kra/-írá* in their alleged past.<sup>12</sup> These are particularly known in literature as aspectual distinctions. Moreover, although there are times when the markers can be mapped in texts as representing tense, there are many other instances in which the alleged correspondence does not take place. We find that a perfective (*-kra*) or imperfective (*-írá*) interpretation, for example, is not possible and a present interpretation is required instead; or a present interpretation is expected but is not possible (despite the marker in the verb). Examples (24, 25) below illustrate instances in which there is no correspondence between the markers and their alleged tense. This is a segment from a Boruca legend that tells the story of the daughters of Mamrang (a legendary Boruca character) and how the Boruca

<sup>12</sup> It is important to emphasise that the data show that in Boruca, the so-called pluperfect form is not preferred over a perfect form given a) that a perfect form does not exist, and b) that the perfect function is not assumed by the pluperfect form.

wizards got rid of them; the time setting is [+past], but as expected, time does not necessarily generate tense in these examples.

- (24) *cuando i-ng diez años bag-rá róhk*  
 when 3PL-FOC ten years have-PRS PL  
 ‘When they were ten years old (lit.: when they had ten years...),  
*dabag-ísh’-i-ng i be ki kába*  
 come-NEG-3PL-FOC POSS mother SPEC house  
 they didn’t come to her mother’s house.  
*já i-ng deg-áh-ra róhk tamaño-r-i-ng róhk*  
 DEM 3PL-TOP go-finish-PRS PL big-COP-3PL-TOP PL  
 They already left, they were old.  
*te-rá bó’s róhk ki ang*  
 say-PRS wizards PL SPEC EMPH  
 The wizards said:  
*já róhk ki ang di’ suhkra ígui wá’ róhk-ra*  
 DEM PL SPEC EMPH water watcher POSS daughter PL-HAB  
 THOSE are the daughters of the Water Watcher.’

Although we might be led to think that the *Tense hypothesis*/TH would propose a historical present reading, this analysis is ruled out due to the function that historical present has (that of signalling punctual events, which is not the case here). Considering that the main line of the story uses the marker *-ra*, one can conclude that here *-ra* is used to narrate rather than to describe punctual events. One that could be a typical example of historical present is given in (25) below; however, there is no correspondence between markers and tense there either. Note how in the dialogue section there are both *-ra* and *-irá* forms, supposedly present and imperfective, when one would expect a historical present (present and imperfective) interpretation.

- (25) *ang be só’ ki de-kra bo bo bo bo bo*  
 FOC mother old DEF go-PST cry cry cry cry cry  
*i juag-í i bó’s róhk ki ká*  
 3SG talk-INF 3SG wizards PL SPEC to  
 ‘The old woman went, crying and crying to talk to the wizards,  
*bó’s róhk ki i ka*  
 wizards PL ART 3SG to  
 and they (said) to her:  
*ba kóngróhk ki jashi-ra ba ú chí kahk ta*  
 2SG man SPEC stand-PRS POSS house in inside in  
 Your man stands inside your house.

*ba ki pensa-ra ki*  
2SG TOP think-PRS that

*n-i-ng já ki dut tsíd-íra já ki kóngróhk íra*  
that-3SG-TOP DEM TOP bird DIM-COP DEM SPEC man COP  
You think that that one is a bird, that one is a man.

*daba-kra ramróhk ki ú chí kahk ta*  
arrive-PST woman ART house in inside in  
The woman arrived inside the house...'<sup>13</sup> (Quesada Pacheco, 1996: 49)

Finally, Constenla and Maroto (1986) claim that there is a “second series” of verbs, when in reality such a series does not exist. On the contrary, the markers that conform this so-called optional series are rather markers of *Aktionsart* (hence their optionality). This idea will be discussed in sections 2.2 and 2.4 below.

## 2.2. The case for aspect

A common feature for Chibchan languages is the presence of aspectual systems; Quesada (2007: 68) points out that “most [Chibchan] languages have three basic aspectual distinctions (perfective, imperfective and perfect), to which a complementary series can be added (usually ingressive, resultative and progressive).” Boruca, however, has not been analysed from an aspectual perspective in the past; this fact alone suggests the possibility of such analysis now. Although Constenla and Maroto (1986) and Quesada Pacheco’s (1995, 1996) proposal has been taken as valid for many years, its flaws are evident. An alternative, more encompassing and less problematic argumentation is possible. A detailed analysis of the Boruca TAM system reveals that the TAM paradigm can be better accounted for if we assume that Boruca is a tenseless language. In this view, the markers presented in Figure 1 above are aspectual markers rather than tense markers. Thus in Boruca, the internal constituency of a situation is more central than the actual sequence of events in time, and these aspectual distinctions are grammaticalised and expressed by the markers in Figure 2 below. The system consists of a basic dichotomy between perfective and imperfective distinctions which are subdivided into further distinctions: an imperfective situation may be either *actual*; that is, “the action of the verb begins before reference time [in narration (not speech act) DC], develops during reference time and extends beyond reference time; its end point is not specified”

<sup>13</sup> If one were to follow the TH proposal, one would assign a present interpretation to the interior of the discourse, but we see that this does not correspond to the verbal morphology in the examples, given that verbs are marked with the forms *-kra*, *-ra*, *-irá*.

(Quesada 1995:11), or it could be *durative*, in which case the reference time is not relevant and “the given situation lasts for...or at least is conceived of as lasting for a certain period of time” (Comrie 1998: 41). On the other hand, perfective situations can either be *punctual*, in which events “have no internal structure because they occur at an instant in time. Sometimes this aspect is referred to as instantaneous” (Payne 1997: 241); or they could be *anterior*, where “anterior aspect [refers to] a situation occurring before reference time and relevant to reference time” (Smith 2001: 379).<sup>14</sup> The distribution of aspectual markers in Boruca would be represented as follows.

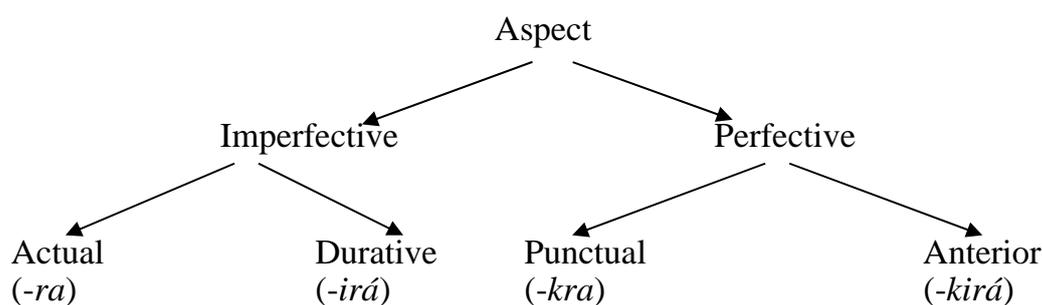


Figure 2. The proposed Boruca aspectual system.

This proposal would account for examples (24, 25) above, where all of the verbs marked with *-ra* can be given an aspectual, *actual* interpretation rather than a temporal one; that is, both the distribution and the interpretation of the markers in the verbs flow and accommodate naturally. Figure 2 also offers the possibility of a more symmetric distribution for the markers, and at the same time, solves the confusion caused by the alleged pluperfect marker, which in this system would express anteriority. (27) below shows the function of *-kirá* as a marker of anteriority. Counts of the distribution of *-kirá* in text appearances in both Constenla and Maroto (1986) and Quesada Pacheco (1996) confirm that *-kirá* marked verbs do not necessarily depend on another verb in the sentence (as in 26). From this, one can conclude that *-kirá* is not necessarily a relative tense requiring a point of reference (27), but that it also can behave only as an anteriority marker.

<sup>14</sup> By reference time or moment of speech, one does not mean speech act; that is, speech act and point of reference in narration need not coincide. Moreover, it is crucial to keep in mind that given that this proposal implies a transitional process from a tense to a tenseless system, the limits of one aspect in regard to another are not always completely clear cut, as overlapping may occur at times.

- (26) *raht-kr-i-ng dekjú'wa áji' jabá'tang í já' í ingdaba-kirá í*  
 leave-PNT-3SG-TOP run again hill 3SG where 3SG-TOP come.back-ANT by  
 'He left running again by the hill where he had come.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 92)
- (27) *bú'k turi abí-ng Ponciano ki ka uring-kíra é'tse kóngát é'tse ramát*  
 two cow EMPH-TOP P. SUBJ to lose-ANT one male one female  
 'Two cows Ponciano had lost, one male and one female.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 86)

The function of the system in Figure 2 is also more readily identifiable in texts (see 28 below) and along the lines of Binnick (1991: 378, 379), where the perfective is used in foregrounding narrative in which the most important events are mentioned (*jabáhkring*, *kohtkrá*, *ahtkrá*), while the imperfective is used in descriptive, supporting, background material not referring to main events (*bejángíring*, *taríng*).

- (28) *Káhk Chi' ki jabáh-kr-i-ng róhk kási i-ng koht-krá róhk*  
 Ditch Llano SPEC pass-PNT-3PL-FOC PL almost 3PL-FOC die-PNT PL  
 'They passed by the Llano Ditch, they almost died:  
*dí' ki bejáng-ír-i-ng róhk*  
 water SPEC want-DUR-3PL-TOP PL  
 they wanted the water.  
*já ta i-ng aht-krá róhk / já ta-r-í-ng róhk*  
 DEM in 3PL-TOP stay-PNT PL / DEM in-ACTL-3PL-TOP PL  
 They stayed there. They are there.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 68)

### 2.3. A note on *-kirá*

While Fig. 2 accounts more adequately for the verbal Boruca paradigm, the role of the anterior marker still needs to be addressed in greater detail. In the TH, *-kirá* represents a problem of symmetry. As mentioned above, there is an empty slot in the distribution given that this hypothesis claims to have a pluperfect marker without actually having a perfect marker. In the aspectual view, although *-kirá*, representing anteriority, justifies many examples that the TH does not explain, it does not cover the sentences in which it seems to function as a relative past tense marker. Both of these hypotheses admittedly fail to explain certain examples; in addition, linguists do not agree on whether anteriority expresses an aspectual distinction or not. These are situations that invite linguists to participate in future studies. Figure 3 below shows the verb paradigm without anteriority.

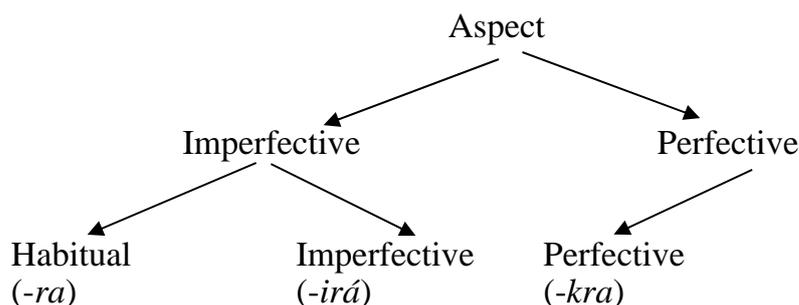


Figure 3. The Boruca Aspectual system minus anteriority.

Given the above characteristics, the contrasting aspect/tense interpretations and the distribution of the aspectual markers in texts, one is led to believe that there is a possibility of Boruca being a tenseless language. Furthermore, if one considers the state of the language at the moment of compiling the information of the written sources used in this analysis, a strong possibility of a transitional process in the language emerges. It is quite possible that Boruca was a tense language in the past and that it was, towards the end of its existence, becoming a tenseless language. Further consideration should be given to the basis of this argument: 1. The frequency of instances of the marker *-kirá* is quite low compared to the number of appearances of the other markers (*-ra*, *irá*, *kra*); *-kirá* appears rather vaguely. Even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century text, in spite of the fact that it only is present in three short stories, all of them refer to a time prior to the present time of the speaker; however, only in three instances is the marker used. 2. One of the last semi-speakers of Boruca claimed not to know or recognise the form; this indicates that it was not commonly used.<sup>15</sup> 3. Texts that were collected between 1892 and 1896 (Pittier 1941: 89-94) already exhibit a low frequency of occurrences of the marker, and at the same time the difficulty for assigning meaning to this marker is evident, even then. This argument is particularly interesting given that in none of the instances in which *-kirá* is used is the verb (or phrase) glossed as is the rest of the text and even the free translation of the sentences is missing in two out of the three cases. The examples of the three sentences containing *-kirá* are given below; the cases where the glosses are underlined correspond to glosses that were given by the author of the present study. These glosses are reconstructed based on comparisons with newer data and they were absent from the original text.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Eligia Maroto, a semi-speaker of the language, in personal communication with Miguel Quesada Pacheco openly expressed that she had not heard this form and did not ever intend to use it (Quesada Pacheco, personal communication, November 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Although the examples are taken from secondary sources, the glosses and spelling have been adapted for the sake of uniformity; as mentioned before, in the cases where I have provided the glosses, they appear underlined. In two cases in (31), Spanish was used in the original text.

In the cases in which it was not possible to provide an appropriate gloss, a question mark indicates this. The rest of the glosses correspond to those in the original text.

- (29) *big igé ta due'shí dekrá kak i króshatang irane di-ng debak-i'-irá*  
 another day to early go-PNT sun POSS ten ? 1PL-EMPH arrive-3SG-DUR  
*ejé' di rú tá ja' áji' mang che'át at bukua ta-kirá*  
 again POSS boat to there again then sick POSS body from-PNT  
 'The next day, early, around ten, we went back to the boat again, again there,  
 then I was sick from my body.' (Pittier 1941: 90)
- (30) *kak i nani i den inkwa-i-kirá*  
 sun POSS lower POSS way shelter-3PL-PNT  
 'Around sunset they took shelter on their way.' (along the road) (Pittier 1941: 90)
- (31) *kak i burane jobrú' que ya adjie tru'-kirá máng como puede*  
 sun POSS nightfall rain that already again fall-PLPFV and as possible  
*já'ung ka já'ung ukte-kra.*  
 lay on lay bunch.together-PNT.  
 'The night came and it rained, again (the rain) had fallen, and, as we could, we  
 laid together.' (Pittier 1941: 91)

All of the above examples show the use of *-kirá*, and it can be observed that different interpretations are possible. In all cases a punctual interpretation is suitable, but sentence (30) allows an anterior interpretation as well, whereas sentence (31) might also allow a pluperfect interpretation. Even though these translations are not provided in the original text, they are all plausible in the given context. The facts mentioned above suggest that Boruca was in a process of transition from being a tense language to becoming a tenseless one, even in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

## 2.4. Aktionsarten

This section deals with expressing *Aktionsarten*. In section 2.1 above, I mentioned what Constenla & Maroto (1986) erroneously labelled "a second series of verbs". This new proposal suggests that these forms do not represent a different series of verbs; instead they express various *Aktionsarten*. All of the forms in the so-called second series actually belong to a category that should be kept separate as they describe a manner of action rather than a level of completion of an action; morphologically these forms are non-obligatory; instead they are derivational affixes that attach to the root of the verb. Aspectual markers, along with any other verbal suffixes follow these forms. The *Aktionsart* forms in Boruca can be divided into phases, a consuetudinary form and an intensity marker. The

phases, in turn, are divided into Imminent (*ja*) ‘to be about’, Ingressive (*já’sa*) ‘to start’, Continuative (*do’á*) ‘to continue’, Terminative (*-krog*) ‘to finish, stop’, and Egressive (*-áh*) ‘to just X’, ‘already’. The consuetudinary marker is *-mang* ‘use to’, and the intensity marker is the free morpheme *bra’é* ‘excessively.’ Figure 4 presents the distribution of *Aktionsart* forms in Boruca. (32-37) illustrate these forms.

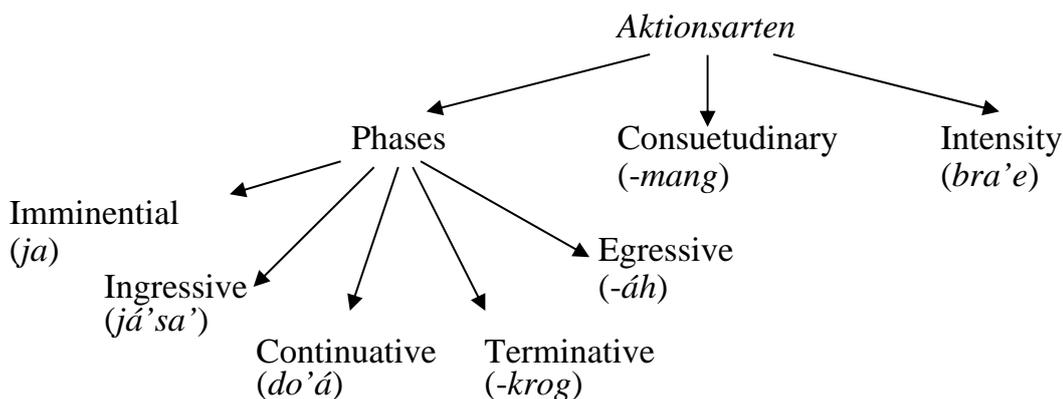


Figure 4. *Aktionsarten* in Boruca.

The first phase is the imminent phase; this is expressed by the free morpheme *ja* which can appear in sentence initial position or could also be preceded by the subject of the sentence. It can bear the TAM morpheme as in example (32) below; and it could also contain the subject of the sentence (*jar-í-ng* ‘he is about to’). Observe that the verb in (32) carries the infinitive marker; it is also possible for the verb to have no infinitive marker. Finally, Quesada Pacheco (1995: 84) claims that there is a special form for 1SG when this is affixed to the imminent marker, which is *jahkra* or *jahkrang*.<sup>17</sup>

- (32) *ja-rá*                      *ba-ng*    *tru’-í*  
 to.be.about-ACTL    2SG-FOC    fall-INF  
 ‘You are about to fall.’

A second *Aktionsart* phase is the ingressive phase, marking the beginning of an action. In Boruca it is expressed by the independent morphemes *já sa’*, which can also be marked by the TAM morphemes in their different forms. The continuative phase, is expressed by the free morpheme *do’á*. This morpheme can precede or follow the verb that optionally (and most frequently) carries the aspectual markers. *Do’á* can also be separated from the verb by the subject or the object of the sentence.

<sup>17</sup> This author refers to sentences containing *ja* as ‘immediate future’ sentences, although he also mentions that these forms could be used to express an action that can take place the following day, not necessarily in the immediate future. Hence, imminent seems to be a more appropriate category.

Quesada Pacheco (1995: 97) points out that the aspectual markers (such as in *do'a-ra*) or subject markers where it drops the final vowel (as in *do'ing*),<sup>18</sup> can also be added to *do'á*. In (33), both the ingressive and the continuative phases are illustrated.

- (33) *kwíng suát róhk ki do'á dabag-ra di' Brúncakh ki ta*  
 many white PL EMPH continue arrive-ACTL POSS boruca SPEC in  
*wé' tegí ki róhk dóhg-r-i-ng reshí*  
 DEM story SPEC PL listen-ACTL-3PL-TOP only  
*iné i-ng jása'-ra rohk i di*  
 and 3PL-TOP begin-ACTL PL 3SG look  
 'Many whites continue to come to Boruca and when they listen to this story,  
 they start looking for it.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 108)

In Boruca, the terminative phase is marked by the affix *-krog*. This morpheme attaches to the root of the verb and is followed by aspectual markers to indicate the end of an action. See (34) below.

- (34) *ja-bih ta i-ng i' íng-krog-írá*  
 DEM-EMPH with 3PL-TOP 3SG tie-finish-DUR  
 'With that very thing they finished tying it.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 98)

Boruca expresses an egressive action, one that has been recently finished, with the use of the suffix *-áh*. This suffix also attaches to the verb root and is followed by the aspectual markers.

- (35) *i' ishd-áh-r-í-ng róhk ki ja*  
 3SG see-just-ACTL-3PL-TOP PL REL DEM  
*ki súk I ju'úkra ki kachí'shi-ra kí tá*  
 SPEC cave POSS entrance SPEC cover-ACTL sea with  
 'They just saw it, that cave's entrance was covered by the sea.'

The continuative phase is expressed in Boruca by adding the affix *-mang* to the verbal root to express an action that keeps happening for an extended period; the aspectual markers follow this suffix. Quesada Pacheco (1995: 90) affirms that when *-mang* is followed by what he has

<sup>18</sup> Quesada (2007:70) claims that *'do'a'* is a verb meaning 'give' or 'marry' which can function as an auxiliary or lexical verb; however, the forms that express these verbs in Boruca are *'do'* and *'já do'* respectively. The current analysis does not conceive the form *'do'a'* as an auxiliary verb derived from the previously mentioned lexical verbs. No explanation has been found to justify the presence of the vowel 'a' in *'do'a'*; however, the syntactic characteristics of *'do'a'* seem to point towards a grammaticalisation process. No fixed position is assigned to *'do'a'* in a sentence and more than one semantic function seems to be possible. Future studies will aim at the possibility of *'do'a'* performing a duplicity of functions as auxiliary and as a durative marker.

called a past tense marker, the action refers to a situation that started in the past but affects the present.

- (36) *ja-bí déngí abí róhk ki jaí-mang-kra*  
 DEM-EMPH later people PL SPEC go-be.used.to-PNT  
*já ki drik ú ki isht*  
 DEM SPEC metal HOUSE SPEC see  
 ‘THAT ONE, people later were used to go see that metal house.’  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 104)

Finally, the intensive phase in Boruca is expressed analytically by the free morpheme *bra'é*. This morpheme follows the verb and can carry the TAM morpheme. As observed in example (37), the verb carries the infinitive marker. Constenla and Maroto (1986: 17) state that this morpheme functions as an intensifier and could even express excessive intensity.

- (37) *í ki tegu-i bra'é-ra*  
 3SG TOP talk-INF excessive-ACTL  
 ‘He talks excessively.’  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 17)

## 2.5. Mood

According to Quesada (2007: 69), mood is not such a strong characteristic in Central American languages as it is in Colombian languages. In Boruca, mood can be expressed through bound morphology, in the case of imperatives (*-a/-ra*), or analytically, in the case of the exhortative *cha*. Both are discussed below; the case of the imperative marker will be dealt with first.

### 2.5.1. Imperative: (*dí*) -a

One characteristic of the imperative is that the verb can be inflected by the morpheme *-a* to convey imperative force; additionally, imperative illocutionary force can also be spotted in another construction through the use of the aspectual marker *-ra* (Quesada Pacheco 1995: 99), (see 38-40 for imperative cases). Another characteristic of the imperative is that it cannot be negated with the negative marker *-i'shi-*; instead, to create a negative imperative (39, 40), the free morpheme *dí* precedes the subject and the verb of the clause. The imperative in Boruca does not distinguish between transitive and intransitive verbs. According to Quesada Pacheco (1995: 99-100), imperatives do not take information-structure makers (*ki, ang, abí*); however, these markers (particularly *ang*) must be present in negative

imperatives (39, 40); the absence of an information-structure marker in a negative statement would render the sentence ungrammatical (41).

- (38) *ba tú'a*  
2SG eat  
'Eat.'
- (39) *dí bi-ng dabag-á*  
NEG 2PL-SUBJ come-IMP  
'Don't come!'
- (40) *dí bi-ng dabag-rá*  
NEG 2PL-SUBJ come-ACTL  
'Don't come!'
- (41) *\*dí ba dabag-rá*  
NEG 2PL come-ACTL

### 2.5.2. Exhortative

The exhortative *cha* is not to be confused with the desiderative suffix in (43) below. The exhortative occurs in sentence initial position and optionally can be followed by subject and information-structure markers as in example (42) below.

- (42) *chá-ng a'r úhtsa ki shúng-ra bá' be ki ta*  
come-EMPH 1SG bite SPEC send-ACTL POSS mother SPEC to  
'Come, I want to send a bite to your mother.' (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 92)

### 2.6. Modality

In Boruca desiderative and deontic modality are expressed through bound morphology. The desiderative morpheme attaches to the root and can be followed by negative and aspectual markers as in (43). The deontic modality is expressed by the bound morpheme *-ishkóng*, which expresses an action that conveys duty or obligation as in (44). This affix also attaches to the verb root and can be followed by aspectual markers.

- (43) *i kabát ék-ír-í-ng ya-b-ú'-i-ng i juak-ch-i'sh-irá*  
POSS brother of-DUR-3SG-FOC DEM-EMPH-for-3SG-TOP 3SG say-want-NEG-DUR  
'He was her brother, for that she didn't want to tell him.'  
(Constenla & Maroto 1986: 70)
- (44) *iné i tebek kí dí-kr-i-ng róhk ái'-ishkóng*  
and POSS snake TOP look.for-PNT-3PL-TOP PL kill-have.to  
'And they looked for their snake in order to kill it.'  
(Constenla & Maroto 1986: 52)

The previous section has provided a more complete analysis of the TAM system of Boruca. The central discussion around the tense/aspect opposition sheds light on the main distinctions used in the language. Also important is the incorporation of *Aktionsarten* as a component of the verb structure. These elements had not been considered in earlier analyses. The next section deals with the structure of verbs in Boruca.

### 3. Verb structure

The verb structure in Boruca is summarised in 45.

- (45) [ROOT (INF) (AKT) ~ (MOD)( NEG) (ASP) (SUBJ-IS)(MOOD)]

According to (45), besides simply having a bare verb (i.e., a root such as *tec*, ‘hablar’), there are three possible forms for verb structure in Boruca. In the first, the verb root and the infinitive marker combine (46). There is also the possibility of having a verbal root marked by an *Aktionsart* form or a modality marker; a negative form could optionally follow either one of these. Aspectual markers and subject forms could optionally follow the verbal root. See (47) below containing an *Aktionsart* marker and (48) containing a modality marker. The last possibility is to have a root form and a mood marker such as an imperative as in (49).

- (46) *teg-ih*  
talk-INF  
‘to talk’
- (47) *ishd-áh-r-í-ng*  
see-just-ACTL-3PL-TOP<sup>19</sup>  
‘he just saw’
- (48) *juak-ch-í’sh-irá*  
say-want-NEG-DUR  
‘did not want to say’
- (49) *ba dabag-á*  
2SG come-IMP  
‘You come!’ (Come!)

---

<sup>19</sup> The term ‘topic’ is used here along the lines of Lambrecht (1994: 118), “the thing which the proposition expressed by the sentence is ABOUT” [emphasis in original]. As mentioned above, this is one function of the marker *ang* in Boruca subjects.

## 4. Valence and syntactic operations

### 4.1 Valence increasing operations

In Boruca there is only one valence-increasing process. Causativity is found in one presumably fossilised collocation; applicatives and possessor raising have not been attested. Causativity is basically expressed lexically through the fossilised collocation *chikáh* ('to make noise or sound'). This verbal root can be followed by modality or aspectual markers.

- (50) *kák ki ba'-kra mang i-ng krú ki chikáh-kra*  
 day ART dawn-PNT and 3SG-SUB snail ART sound.make-PNT  
 'The day started and he made the snail sound.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 70)

One can hypothesise that the fossilised collocation was reanalyzed as *chikáh* (*chik* 'sound'+ *ah* 'make'). This suggests that *ah* originally assumed a causative function: it expresses the idea of making something happen, to cause that to happen. In (51), if the door is closed, this happens because someone caused it to close. This function could be observed in sentences such as (51) below:

- (51) *rahd-í'sh-i-ng jét di-ng i' ú karás ki I ká du'-áh-ra*  
 leave-NEG-3SG-AGR for they-SUBJ POSS house door DEF 3PL to close-CAUS-ACTL  
 'For him not to leave, they, the door of his house, they caused it to close.'  
 (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 56)

In turn, this type of causative construction gave way to what was discussed in (35) above as egressive *Aktionsart*. It is important to bear in mind that, semantically, both causativity and an egressive phase are very close. The directionality of the semantic evolution seems to go from causativity to an egressive reading, given that there is only one causative collocation in the data, whereas there are many instances of *-ah* expressing egressive *Aktionsart*. The basic order of the constituents of the sentence may be altered when *Aktionsart* markers are present. See (52) below.

- (52) *a we'é dabag-áh-ra-ng*  
 ah! here got-already-ACTL-SUBJ  
 'I already got here.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 64)

### 4.2. Valence decreasing operations

There is only one valence decreasing operation in Boruca: reflexives and reciprocals. In Boruca reflexives and reciprocals are expressed analytically and they are signaled by the reflexive pronoun *já'* in preverbal position. The number of arguments in Boruca's transitive clauses

is reduced since a single argument fills the slot of two grammatical relations. These clauses are also semantically intransitive because both syntactic arguments refer to a single entity in the message world.

- (53) *ja-kr-i-ng*      *já'*    *bei*    *róhk*    *Káhk Chi'*    *tá*  
 go-PNT-3PL-SUBJ REFL hide PL    K. C.    in  
 'They went to hide (themselves) in Káhk Chi.' (Constenla & Maroto 1986: 74)

Reciprocals are signaled by the same pronoun as reflexives (*já'*); in these constructions the two participants equally act upon each other, and both are equally agent and patient.

- (54) *já*    *ki*    *druk*    *tsúng*    *ki*    *já'*    *úng-íra*    *róhk*    *káng*    *ki*    *já'*    *úng-íra*    *róhk*  
 DEM SPEC iron machine ART REC hit-DUR PL    stone DEF REC hit-DUR PL  
*kráng*    *róhk*    *ki*    *úng-íra*    *róhk*    *i*    *shiská*    *róhk*    *ki*    *já'*    *shé-íra*    *róhk*  
 stick PL DEF hit-DUR PL POSS nose PL SPEC REC tear.off-DUR PL  
*i*    *jé'tsa*    *róhk*    *ki*    *ógé*    *cóngát*    *ramát*    *róhk*    *ki*    *ógé*  
 POSS arm PL SPEC all man woman PL DEF all  
 'There, they hit each other with knives, they hit each other with stones, they hit each other with sticks, they tore off each other's noses and arms, men and women all.'  
 (Quesada Pacheco 1996: 34)

## Conclusion

The description presented here provides a basis for a better understanding of the verbal dimension in Boruca. First, it considers the inclusion of the category of *infinitive* in the defining properties of verbs in the language, a characteristic that, although subtly mentioned in the past, had never been considered seriously. Second, it discusses the TAM characteristics of the language; most importantly, it offers a more adequate analysis of verbal constituency in terms of a transitional language moving from a tense system to an aspectual system. Finally, also important is the fact that the present analysis incorporates the *Aktionsart* theory in this language description; this theory had not been included in previous analyses.

## Abbreviations

ACTL	ACTUAL	MOD	MODALITY
AGR	AGREEMENT	MOOD	MOOD
AKT	<i>AKTIONSARTEN</i>	NUM	NUMERAL
ANT	ANTERIOR	NEG	NEGATIVE
ART	ARTICLE	PL	PLURAL
ASP	ASPECT	PLUP	PLUPERFECT
CAUS	CAUSATIVE	POSS	POSSESSIVE
COP	COPULA	PRFV	PERFECTIVE
DEM	DEMONSTRATIVE	PRS	PRESENT
DIM	DIMINUTIVE	PST	PAST
DUR	DURATIVE	PNT	PUNCTUAL
EMPH	EMPHASIS	REC	RECIPROCAL
FOC	FOCUS	SG	SINGULAR
HAB	HABITUAL	SUBJ	SUBJECT
IMP	IMPERATIVE	SPEC	SPECIFIC
INF	INFINITIVE	TOP	TOPIC
IPFV	IMPERFECTIVE		

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