THE PARTICLE *BAŠ* IN CONTEMPORARY SERBIAN

Mirjana Miskovic

Abstract

The paper is a relevance-theoretic account of the meaning of the Serbian particle *baš,* once a content word, now a pragmatic particle restricted to informal discourse. It is argued that the emphatic and specificatory senses of *baš* can be subsumed under a single description of the particle as a marker of non-loose use. The argumentation is based on the relevance-theoretic distinction between description and interpretation in language use and on the notion of loose talk. The main issue of how the particle contributes to the relevance of its host-utterance is anchored in a tripartite distinction: Conceptual/procedural, truth-functional/non-truth-functional, explicature/implicature. It is claimed that the particle *baš* is a procedural, non-truth-functional linguistic item that contributes to relevance by constraining the explicit content of the host-utterance.

Keywords: Serbian particle, Relevance theory, Loose talk, Literality, Pragmatic meaning.

1. Introduction

Baš is a Turkish loan word that had originally denoted 'bow'[1] (Vujaklija 1996: 106). It was used as an adjective to form noun compounds, such as *baš-èaršija* 'the oldest part of a city', or *baš-knez* 'the senior prince'. The compounds were, however, rather transparent in meaning - the adjective incremented the meaning of the head in the sense 'the oldest', 'the first', 'the nucleus'. In contemporary Serbian *baš* is a clausal focus particle most commonly used in informal discourse types. Morphologically, it is a monosyllabic, lexical, and free morpheme; it is undeclined and does not combine with other morphemes in any of the word-formation processes.

My main concern in this paper[2] is to investigate the meaning of the particle by relating the discussion to three questions: 1. What kind of meaning does the particle encode (i.e. conceptual or procedural); 2. How does it affect the truth-conditions of its host-utterance (i.e. truth-functional or non-truth-functional); 3. How does it constrain the relevance of its host-utterance (i.e. at the level of explicature or implicature)? The analysis of *baš* draws on the relevance-theoretic framework (Sperber and Wilson 1995): Section 2 is an overview of the syntactic properties of the particle; section 3 is an exploration of the emphatic and specificatory functions of *baš* in some typical usages; section 4 is a

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[1] The front part of a boat or a ship.
[2] I am grateful to R. Bugarski and M. Nelson-Dedaiæ for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

description of the pragmatic meaning of the particle, namely how the particle contributes to relevance.

2. The syntax of baš

The particle is invariably linked to a constituent that comes under its scope (usually the first immediate constituent to the right of the particle) and floating is not permitted. Consider (1) to (3):

(1)   *To   nije   baš dobro.*
        That not be-TNSPn FP good-GN
        'That isn't quite good.'

(2)   *To   baš nije   dobro.*
        That FP not be-TNSPn good-GN
        'That isn't good at all.'

(3)   *Baš to   nije   dobro.*
        FP that not be-TNSPn good-GN
        'That's what isn't good.'

The proposition that something is not good is identical in all three cases. The interpretation, however, varies in relation to a constituent that comes under the focus of the particle. In (1) it is the complement *dobro* 'good', which makes the sentence a case of litotes as a stronger claim, such as (2), could have been made. In (2) the particle, usually stressed, focuses on the entire verb phrase *nije dobro* 'isn't good' and the whole utterance has a strongly communicated implicature "It cannot be worse". (While it may be argued that euphemising is present to a degree (2) in contrast to (1) is not a case of litotes.) In (3) only the subject of the sentence, the deictic pronominal *to* 'that', falls under the scope of the particle and the sentence is interpreted as if any other exophoric reference had been excluded ("It is nothing other than THAT").

        The particle can either take the initial position, as in (3), or a middle position, as in (2). The sentence-final *baš* may not render a sentence ungrammatical, but it is rather rare - the particle normally points forward to its focus unless the immediately preceding constituent is stressed. In an intonationally unmarked utterance, such as (2), it is usually the particle that bears the emphatic stress and focuses on the constituent to the right. If the preceding constituent is, however, stressed, as in (4), the particle loses its emphasis, becomes more rapidly pronounced and transfers the focus to the stressed constituent:

(4)   *TO baš nije   dobro.*
        That FP not be-TNSPn good-GN
        'THAT isn't good.' / 'That's what isn't good.'

This may explain why an utterance with *baš* in the final position can be interpreted as incomplete. In other words, the sentence-final *baš* in the surface structure may indicate

ellipsis at work. (Still, this observation merits further investigation.) The deleted constituent can be recoverable in context - (5), for example, would be used in situations where you do not hear from your friend for a considerable period of time, or have no knowledge of his/her whereabouts. The elided constituent can either be the place-adverb *nigde* 'nowhere', or clauses, such as *da nam dodješ* 'to visit us' or *da se javiš* 'to call':

(5)   *Nema   te   baš.*
        Not have-TNSPn you-PnC FP.
        'You are really nowhere.' / 'You are nowhere to be found.'

Similarly, (7) in contrast to (6) is marked because the hearer may reasonably expect the expansion of an utterance where the particle is used sentence-finally:

(6)   *Baš sam   radoznala.*
        FP be-TNSPn inquisitive-GN
        'I'm really inquisitive.' / 'I'm being inquisitive.'

(7)   *Radoznala   sam   baš (da saznam …)*
        Curious-GN be-TNSPn FP
        'I'm curious (to find out …).'

According to the rules of grammar the following positions are restricted for the particle to occur: a) between the explicit subject and the enclitic[3] (8); b) between the verb and the enclitic (9); c) between the modifier and the head (10); d) between the negative particle and the verb (11):

(8)   **On baš se   umorio.*
         He FP ENC tire-TNSPnG

(9)   **Umorio   baš se.*
         Tire-TNSPnG FP   ENC

(10)   **Umešan baš èovek   je   retkost.*
         Able-GN FP man-GNC be-TNSPn rarity-GNC

(11)   **To   ne baš volim.*
         That not FP like-TNSPn

3. The emphatic and specificatory functions of *baš*

Particles have not been amongst the most highly explored linguistic items in traditional

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[3] If the subject is deleted from the surface structure, the particle has to precede the enclitic. Serbian enclitics cannot occur sentence-initially, therefore cases of the medial *baš* (i.e. between the initial enclitic and the verb phrase) have not been considered.

Serbo-Croatian linguistics literature. Nonetheless, it seems to be agreed that the particle is used for emphasis and/or precision. *Baš* is glossed as 'truly', 'just', 'exactly' and 'precisely' in Serbocroatian-English dictionaries (Benson 1991; Drvodeliæ 1989; Filipoviæ 1989). Stanojèiæ and Popoviæ (1992) consider it an emphatic particle. Stevanoviæ (1986: 384) places *baš* within a broader system of Serbian particles, such as *samo*, *jedino* and *upravo*, but fails to subject them to a contrastive treatment that would show their similarities and differences[4]:

> *Reèce nisu samo reèi za isticanje liènog stava veæ u ovu kategoriju idu sve one reèi koje služe za bilo kakvo isticanje. [R]eèima* samo *i* jedino, baš *i* upravo *ono što se iznosi u dotiènoj reèenici izuzima se od svega ostalog, ili se precizira.*

> Particles are not only words that emphasise the speaker's personal attitude. This category also includes all those words whose function is any kind of emphasis. [T]he words *samo* and *jedino*, *baš* and *upravo* convey that what is said in the sentence is excluded from the rest or is made more precise.

I start my analysis by discussing two groups of cases - one where the particle focuses on a certain process, a state, or a quality, the other where it is used in temporal, locative and deictic expressions. Let us first consider some examples of the emphatic *baš*:

(12)   *Baš peva.*[5]
         FP sing-TNSPn
         'S/he is really/truly singing (beautifully).'

(13)   *Baš sam   umorna.*
         FP   be-TNSPn tired-GN
         'I'm really/truly tired.'

(14)   *Baš lepa   žena.*
         FP beautiful-GN woman-GN
         'A really/truly beautiful woman.'

(15)   *Baš brzo trèi.*
         FP fast   run-TNSPn
         'S/he is really running fast.'

In (12) the particle focuses on a process (on the intransitive verb *pevati* 'to sing') but it is

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[4] It should be noted that both *samo* and *jedino* can be translated as 'only', and *baš* and *upravo* as 'just' or 'exactly'. Additionally, *samo* can also be translated as 'just' (see Benson 1991; Drvodeliæ 1989; Filipoviæ 1989).

[5] A possible divergence in use of the particle between Serbian and Croatian has not been considered. M. Nelson-Dedaiæ (personal communication) has pointed out that her reading of the sentence (in Croatian) would be 'S/he is singing right now'. In Serbian, however, this reading would obtain only if the sentence were a reply to a question containing an alternative, such as *Da li peva ili recituje?* 'Is s/he singing or reciting?' Even then, however, the sentence would not sound natural. The only meaningful reading (both contextual and extra-contextual) of the sentence in Serbian would be the one discussed in this paper.

rather the manner that is being emphasised - the hearer will not interpret (12) to mean that the singer could never sing before (e.g. vocal problems). The statement is, in fact, a stronger claim that not only is the singer singing, but is doing it extremely well. The same kind of interpretation would have been applied to (15) if the process (the intransitive verb *trèati* 'to run') had not already been modified by the adverb *brzo* 'fast'. As it is, the function of the particle is simply to emphasise the adverb or, similarly, the adjective *lep*[6] 'beautiful' in (14). The hearer of (13) will interpret the speaker's state of tiredness as that of bordering on exhaustion.

Let us now turn to cases of the specificatory *baš*:

(16)   *Poštar   je došao   baš kad sam odlazio   od   kuæe.*
Postman-GNC come-TNSPnG FP when leave-TNSPnG from house-GNC
'The postman came just as I was leaving the house.'

(17)   *Knjiga   je   baš na stolu.*[7]
Book-GNC be-TNSPn FP on table-GNC
'The book is right on the table.'

In temporal and locative expressions *baš* reaffirms the time and place defined by temporal and locative adverbials: In (16) it is no other time than the one specified by the temporal clause *kad sam odlazio od kuæe* 'as I was leaving the house', and in (17) it is no other place than the one delimited by the place-adverb *na stolu* 'on the table'.

Before considering the function of *baš* in deictic expressions a few words about (in)definiteness in Serbian may be in order. As there are no articles like English *a* and *the*, or French *un/une* and *le/la/les*, other linguistic means, such as demonstratives [8], the adjectival aspects[9], or indefinite pronouns [10] are used to mark the distinction. (In)definiteness may also be linguistically unmarked if the information is otherwise recoverable in context. In the case of *baš* the particle cannot be used with (pro)nominals unless they have been somehow defined. Consider (18) and (19):

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[6] Words commented on are given in their unmarked form, for instance the masculine form (*lep* 'beautiful') *vs*. the feminine form (*lepa* 'beautiful') of adjectives.

[7] Some native speakers may find (17) unnatural as a shorter statement is more likely to be used: *Baš na stolu / Baš tamo* 'Right on the table' / 'Right there' as a reply to the question *Gde je knjiga? / Da li je knjiga na stolu* 'Where is the book?' / 'Is the book on the table?' Or, it may be used as a reply to a question suggesting an alternative, for instance *Je li knjiga na stolu ili pokraj stola?* 'Is the book on the table or near the table'. This, however, does not affect my main argument.

[8] In relation to the proximity and distance from the deictic centre Serbian distinguishes the singular *ovaj-taj-onaj* and plural masculine forms *ovi-ti-oni* as well as the singular *ova-ta-ona* and plural feminine forms *ove-te-one*. The proximal forms *ovaj-ova-ovi-ove* mark nearness to the deictic centre ('within reach'); the distal forms *onaj-ona-oni-one* mark distance from the deictic centre ('out of reach and view'); the medial forms *taj-ta-ti-te* mark lesser distance from the deictic centre ('out of reach but within view').

[9] The indefinite and definite aspects in the masculine and feminine forms (e.g. *plav šešir* 'a blue hat' *vs*. *plavi šešir* 'the blue hat').

[10] The indefinite pronouns *neki* 'some' (used both in singular and plural) and *jedan* 'one' (used only in singular); for instance, *Došao je jedan/neki èovek.* 'A man arrived/has come.' *Dosli su neki ljudi.* 'Some people arrived/have come.'

(18)   *Baš ta   kuæa.*
        FP that-GNC house-GNC
        'The very house.' / 'Exactly that house.'

(19)   **Baš kuæa.*
         FP house-GNC

In other words, an entity has to be specified if the particle is to occur. As in the case of temporal and locative expressions *baš* is used in deictic expressions to highlight the already restricted focus.[11]

    To consider *baš* a focus particle falls squarely with the way Hartmann (1998: 659) defines them:

> [T]he proposition P (without the focus particle) is valid as presupposed. The assertion of the focus particle phrase means that no other scope-formulation than the one resulting from the particle sentence produces an appropriate remark, related to the sentence context. Or only p=p and not not p.

The above analysis points to the plausibility of positing a unified description of the meaning of *baš*. According to the cases discussed so far it seems that the main idea to get across when using the particle is "It is not only that   *P* - it is *P* indeed" (*P* being a property on which the particle focuses)[12]. In the next section I attempt to account for the pragmatic meaning of *baš* by relating my discussion to three distinctions: Conceptual/procedural, truth-functional/non-truth-functional, and explicature/implicature.

4. The pragmatics of *baš*

My proposal is that   *baš* should be analysed as a non-truth-conditional particle that contributes procedurally to the explicature of an utterance. The procedural meaning the

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[11] Here is an apparent counter-example:

A: *Video sam lava.*
   I've seen a lion
B: *Baš lava? / Baš?*
   FP a lion? / FP?
A: *Baš!*
   FP!

Although the focus of the particle (a lion) is not a definite NP it is, nonetheless, already mentioned. In fact, the example supports my claim that *baš* is a marker of non-loose use. Furthermore, B's incredulity at A's statement would be interpreted as "Nothing less than a lion"; hence the need to further restrict the focus with the particle.

[12] I am grateful to an anonymous referee for drawing my attention to Ekkehard König's monograph *The Meaning of Focus Particles* (Routledge 1991: 135), which, unfortunately, I have not had an opportunity to consult. The author considers that the basic function of focus particles, such as Serbian *baš*, is that of "assert[ing] emphatically the identity of two values in different propositions".

particle encodes is that the scope of the particle is not to be loosely interpreted[13]. In order to explain how the particle contributes to the process of utterance interpretation I shall have recourse to the relevance-theoretic main postulates and, more specifically, to the notion of loose talk.

In the relevance-theoretic account of communication (Sperber and Wilson 1995) comprehension is not just a matter of decoding but heavily relies on inference. The process of utterance interpretation is governed by a single principle according to which "every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its optimal relevance" (ibid.176). Since relevance is a cost-benefit system (it increases with the strength of the contextual effects achieved and decreases with the amount of processing effort needed to arrive at the intended interpretation) there cannot be more than one interpretation optimally consistent with the principle of relevance. To simplify, the interpretation process starts with flashing out the incomplete semantic representation of an utterance into the explicature - a process achieved by disambiguation, reference assignment and enrichment. If during interpretation the hearer does not find the explicit content of an utterance optimally relevant (i.e. it is inconsistent with the principle of relevance) s/he will search for extra contextual assumptions by supplying the manifestly most accessible premises which will enable him/her to reach the intended implicated conclusion. There are certain expressions in language that rather than encode a concept guide the hearer in the process of utterance interpretation and contribute to relevance by reducing the processing effort needed to reach the intended interpretation (Blakemore 1987, 1996). We shall see that the particle *baš* belongs to the group of words that encode procedural meaning.

Important for my analysis of the particle *baš* is the relevance-theoretic distinction between description and interpretation in language use and related to this the notion of loose talk. An utterance may be used descriptively if it represents a true state of affairs, or what the speaker believes to be true, but it can also be used interpretively if it represents a thought or a report:

(20)   Iain: How long will it take Gaute to finish the job?
        Julie: A day or two.

Julie's utterance can be ambiguous between the descriptive and interpretive reading: She may either be presenting her own belief, or reporting Gaute's estimation. In the last instance, however, every utterance has an interpretive use since it is always a representation of the speaker's thought. To the extent an utterance has the same propositional form as the thought it represents it will either be literal or more or less loose. The speaker may find more optimal (i.e. less processing effort imposed on the hearer) an utterance which is not, strictly speaking, a literal representation of his/her thought, but which, nonetheless, the speaker holds to be true. In small talk, for instance, literal answers are harder to process since increase in effort is not offset by increase in contextual effects. Consider (21a) and (21b) as answers to the question of how long I work:

(21)   a. I work 8 hours and 36 minutes.
        b. I work 8 hours. / I work 8 hours and a half.

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[13] I would like to thank an anonymous referee for pointing this out in an earlier draft of this paper.

(21b) is, strictly speaking, false if I indeed work 8 hours and 36 minutes. Still, by opting for less than literal (21b) under the circumstances where no exact information is expected (e.g. you may simply wish to know whether I generally spend much time at work) I am offering a loose interpretation of what I believe to be true without imposing an unnecessary effort which the literal representation would bring about given the same set of contextual effects.

Literalness is considered a limiting case in relevance theory: "The hearer should take an utterance as fully literal only when nothing less than full literality will confirm the presumption of relevance. In general, some looseness of expression is to be expected" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 234). This explains why the particle *baš* is typically used in everyday interaction when the speaker wants to make manifest a single precise proposition (or the part of a proposition that comes under the scope of the particle). For instance, in the temporal example discussed earlier (repeated here as (22) for convenience) the particle adds the information that no approximation (i.e. looseness) is intended:

(22)   *Poštar   je došao   baš kad sam odlazio   od   kuæe.*
        Postman-GNC come-TNSPnG FP when leave-TNSPnG from house-GNC
        'The postman came just as I was leaving the house.'

Or, to take an example with numerals:

(23)   a. Nina: *Koliko si strana napisala?*
                'How many pages have you written?'
        b. Maja: *Tri.*
                'Three.'
        c. Nina: *Baš tri?*
                '*Baš* three?'
        d. Maja: *Da. (Baš tri.)*
                'Yes.' ('*Baš* three.')

Nina's question in (23c) is not a request for information since Maja has already precisely replied in (23b). It is, however, a request for confirmation that it is no more and no less than the specified number[14]. According to relevance theory assumptions come with a different degree of strength - the likelihood that the particle *baš* will be used depends on how much the speaker intends to make strongly manifest his/her assumption. This explains why the particle is incompatible with approximates, such as the adverb *otprilike* 'roughly' in (24):

(24)   **Sat   je   baš otprilike taèan.*
         Clock-GNC be-TNSPn FP roughly   precise-GN

It is also highly unlikely that *baš* will be used in situations where the speaker is not strongly

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[14] If, for example, *samo* 'only' is used, instead, Nina's question in (23b) will strongly implicate that she has expected more pages to be written (23b will also have a range of weaker implicatures, such as Nina is disappointed, surprised, etc.).

committed to the truth of his/her utterance (the particle goes well together with assertions but not, for instance, with modals expressing uncertainty). *Baš* will not normally be used in the position where it occurs in (25) where it takes under the scope the whole complement *možda prljava* 'maybe/possibly dirty' and thus highlights the part of the proposition that is under the speaker's doubt. The particle may, however, follow the modal, as in (26), because the speaker's attitudinal distance falls outside the scope of   *baš* and is not part of the proposition the speaker strongly communicates. The speaker of (26), at the same time, does not want to appear committed to the truth of the whole proposition, hence the modal word *možda* 'maybe' (e.g. s/he may not know for certain that the shirt is dirty), but s/he also wants to make strongly manifest his/her belief that the shirt is, if anything, a dirty one:

(25)   *Košulja   je   baš možda prljava.*
            Shirt-GNC be-TNSPn FP maybe dirty-GN

(26)   *Košulja   je   možda baš prljava.*
            Shirt-GNC be-TNSPn maybe FP dirty-GN
            'The shirt may indeed be dirty.'

It has been shown so far that the particle *baš* is used whenever the speaker wants to communicate that his/her proposition (or an element of the proposition) is a precise rendering of what s/he intends to say (e.g. a literal representation of his/her thought, a description of the state of affairs the speaker holds true, etc.). According to Blakemore (1996: 151) certain linguistic expressions do not have representational meaning but rather "encode instructions for processing propositional representations" (i.e. they instruct the hearer how to arrive at the intended representation of an utterance). On my analysis *baš* seems to belong to the group of linguistic items that encode procedures. We have seen that *baš* does so by instructing the hearer that any loose interpretation of the scope is disallowed.

The equation between truth-conditional and representational meaning and non-truth-conditional and procedural meaning does not seem to hold   [15]. Blakemore (1996), for instance, mentions performatives *I warn* and *I predict* as encoding representational but non-truth-conditional meaning. Similarly, the question of whether a linguistic expression can either contribute or not at all to the propositional content of its host-utterance is a complex one (see Blass's discussion of *also* being ambiguous between truth-functional and non-truth-functional, 1990). Generally, the situation seems to be straightforward in the case of the specificatory *baš* - the particle can be omitted without affecting the truth-conditions of the host-utterance. The hearer processing either (27a) or (27b) will identify the same proposition, namely that the hearer's slippers are, at the utterance-time, under the bed identified (most likely the hearer's own bed); therefore, omission of the particle does not lead to the loss of propositional meaning. *Baš* in (27b) instructs the hearer that the speaker is fully committed to the literal truth of his/her utterance (the slippers are literally under the bed) and that not even the smallest deviation from the scope of the particle (the place-adverbial modification *ispod kreveta* 'under the bed') is intended. The particle thus enables

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[15] See, for example, Ziv (1998).

the hearer to process the utterance in the smallest accessible context yielding adequate contextual effects and in this way optimises his/her search for relevance[16]:

(27)   a. *Papuèe   su   ti   ispod kreveta.*
        Slippers-GNC be-TNSPn you-PnC under bed-GNC
        'Your slippers are under the bed.'

        b. *Papuèe   su   ti   baš ispod kreveta.*
        Slippers-GNC be-TNSPn you-PnC FP under bed-GNC
        'Your slippers are right under the bed.'

The situation is not equally straightforward with the emphatic *baš* when the particle acquires some scalar properties. Let us first consider (28) and (29):

(28)   a. *Peva.*
        'S/he is singing.'
        b. *Baš peva.*
        'S/he is really/truly singing (beautifully).'

(29)   a. *Umorna sam.*
        'I'm tired.'
        b. *Baš sam umorna.*
        'I'm really/truly tired.'

At first, omission of the particle seems to lead to some loss of the propositional content: "S/he is singing" *versus* "S/he is singing beautifully" in (28a) and (28b), or "I'm tired" *versus* "I'm tired to the point of being exhausted" in (29a) and (29b). In other words, when focusing on a gradable process, a state, or a quality *baš* appears to contribute to the meaning of its focus by incrementing it to the (almost) highest point on the scale. Consider, for instance, (30):

(30)   a. *Greta je bila lepa žena; u stvari baš je bila lepa.*
        'Greta was a beautiful woman; in fact she was *baš* beautiful.'

        b. **Greta je bila baš lepa žena; u stvari bila je lepa.*
        'Greta was *baš* a beautiful woman; in fact she was beautiful.'

Unacceptability of (30b) is due to the fact that the first conjunct already places the quality extremely high on the scale. Since the meaning of the corrective marker *u stvari* 'in fact' is to state the speaker's strongest claim, the correction to a degree lower on the scale in the second conjunct is pragmatically infelicitous. In this respect the emphatic *baš* and its focus resemble the absolute superlative in Italian judging by the illocutionary components Wierzbicka (1991: 276) posits for the construction:

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[16] The same line of argument applies to other cases of the specificatory *baš* (i.e. in temporal and deictic expressions).

È velocissimo/bianchissimo　　('It is <u>most fast</u>/<u>most white</u>')
(a)　　I say: It is very X
(b)　　nothing could be more X
　　　　(i.e. if one cannot say 'X' of this one cannot say it of anything)
(c)　　I feel something thinking about it

I am, however, more inclined not to consider the emphatic *baš* ambiguous between the truth-conditional and non-truth-conditional reading as the same propositional content would be identified if the contrastive intonation were employed, instead:

(31)　a. *Peva.*
　　　　　'S/he is singing.'
　　　b. *Baš peva.*
　　　　　'She is *baš* singing.'
　　　c. *PEVA.*
　　　　　'S/he is SINGING.'

The proposition that s/he is singing is true under the same circumstances in all three cases. On the relevance-theoretic account (31a) is quite uninformative (no, or inadequate contextual effects at the great processing effort) if both the speaker and the hearer are witnessing the occasion that is not unusual in any respect (e.g. the singer's previous vocal problems). What both (31b) and (31c) do is to make manifest to the hearer the assumption that it is not the process or action itself that the speaker is foregrounding but the manner or quality in which it is done. This brings us to the question of how the particle constrains the communicative content of its host-utterance.

　　　　According to relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 182) explicatures and implicatures are two main utterance levels. An explicature is an assumption explicitly communicated - it is a combination of the semantic content of the utterance enriched with contextually inferred conceptual features whereupon full propositionality may be achieved. (Any other assumption that is not explicitly communicated is an implicature.) The proposition of an utterance is derived both from decoding and inference. As the identification of the propositional form based solely on disambiguation and reference assignment would leave it semantically incomplete, some enrichment may be necessary if the hearer is to reach the intended propositional form (for a detailed account of the process see Sperber and Wilson 1995). *Baš* in this process helps the hearer to identify the propositional form of the host-utterance at the level of contextual enrichment. To refer to (31) the interpretation recoverable only by decoding and reference assignment ("S/he is singing") would be irrelevant (i.e. increase on the effort side and decrease on the effect side) if the particle (31b) or the contrastive intonation [17] were omitted. In other words, the information that the scope of the particle is an exact rendering of what the speaker intends to say is a pragmatically inferred part of the explicit content of the proposition.

　　　　The relevance-theoretic account of *baš* as a particle of non-loose use explains why the particle is typically used, and with great frequency, in everyday informal encounters

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[17] This should not be taken as if the meaning of the particle were equated with the function of the focal stress. The discussion about the difference, however, falls outside the scope of this paper.

which, in contrast to academic or other institutional discourse types where the particle is unlikely to occur, are freighted with looseness. The particle contributes to relevance by constraining the hearer's interpretation to that of a literal rendering of the speaker's thought. The relevance-theoretic account can also explain scalar cases (if literalness is an exception rather than a norm, it is easy to see why the explicit linguistic marker of literalness should be taken to indicate remarkableness of a quality, a process, or a state on which the particle focuses) and counter-examples, such as (32):

(32)   A: *Šta kažeš za moju periku?*
              'What do you think of my wig?'
         B: *Baš kao da je prava.*
              'It *baš* looks like real.'

My analysis predicts that the particle will not co-occur with a marker of loose use, such as *kao* 'like'. Still, (32) is acceptable because the false hair resembles the real one to such an extent that the speaker believes s/he could easily have been taken in and is simply confirming to the hearer that the utterance should be taken as a literal representation of such a belief.

5. Concluding remarks

Once a full content word productively participating in the formation of compounds, *baš* has come a long way to being exclusively used as a pragmatic particle with a range of usages limited to informal discourse. However, some traces of the original conceptual meaning (i.e. 'the nucleus') are reflected in the contemporary procedural meaning of the particle as a marker of non-loose use.

In this paper I have argued that it is possible to provide a unified account of the particle which will include both the specificatory and emphatic senses. Couching my analysis within the relevance-theoretic framework I have shown how the particle contributes to utterance interpretation by helping the hearer to optimise his/her search for relevance. More specifically, I have claimed that the speaker is likely to use the particle whenever s/he wants to make strongly manifest a precise set of assumptions. The particle guides the hearer to reach the conclusion that the linguistic material in focus need not be modified since it is an exact rendering of what the speaker intends to say. The particle has, therefore, a bearing on the process of utterance interpretation by helping the hearer to arrive at the intended propositional form and thus contributes to the explicit side of communication. Although omission of the particle does not involve loss in propositional meaning the particle minimises processing effort and optimises contextual effects by enabling the process of enrichment of the propositional form.

Finally, I would like to propose some further points of study this paper has not considered but which may (dis)prove my argumentation: Ironic uses of baš (e.g. *Baš si mi ti neka mustra* 'You're really something') and a more socially-based analysis which will include the investigation of sequential positioning of the particle within a turn in order to verify whether and how the findings relate to this cognitively-based account.

Symbols and abbreviations

C	case
ENC	enclitic
FP	focus particle *baš*
G	gender
M	mood
N	number
Pn	person
TNS	tense/aspect
capitalised words	intonational emphasis
*	in front of an expression means that the expression is either grammatically incorrect or pragmatically unacceptable

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