The Sáliban languages, namely Mako [wpc], Piaroa [pid], and Sáliba [slc] (see Rosés Labrada [Accepted]), are spoken in Venezuela and Colombia in the Middle Orinoco and Ventuari river basins. In this paper, I show—based on first-hand fieldwork data—that the Mako copulas have grammaticalized into TAME and polarity verbal suffixes and argue that this grammaticalization must have occurred at the Proto-Sáliban stage. The evidence for this claim comes primarily from the reconstruction of cognate verbal morphology present in all of the Sáliban languages. Data for Piaroa and Sáliba comes from published sources on these languages.

Some Mako non-verbal predicates are copula-less (1); the language, however, has several copulas, which encode TAME and polarity meanings (see, for example (2) and (3)).

(1) Yulewa hoho-di hobadi-ma
Yureba person-PL those_ones-TOP?
‘those ones are people from Yureba’

(2) (ɨ’h)i ʧ-ũkʷa ɨkʷa-ka
(1SG.PRO) 1SG-POSS’D FUT.COP-CL
‘This (cassava) will be mine’

(3) bi-ka-ma (ɨ’h)i ʧ-ũkʷa-ka ɨkʷa-ka
DEM.PROX-CL.HARD-TOP (1SG.PRO) 1SG-POSS’D.INAN-CL.HARD NEG.COP-CL.HARD
‘This (cassava) is not mine’

A comparison of the copulas above with the verbal suffixes in the partial paradigms for the verb ‘to see’ in Table 1 will reveal that the copulas have served to create new verbal TAME and polarity morphology. Compare, for instance, the negative (blue) and future (red) suffixes in Table 1 with the future and negative copulas in (2) and (3) respectively.

**Table 1 Partial Paradigm for the Verb edi ‘to see’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>PRES</th>
<th>PRES.NEG</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>PAST</th>
<th>FUT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

After exploring the possible source construction and path for this grammaticalization process and based on the existence of cognate verbal morphology in Piaroa and Sáliba (Table 2) for the Mako suffixes with a copula as their historical source, I propose here that this grammaticalization of the Mako copulas must have occurred before the diversification of the common ancestor of Mako, Piaroa and Sáliba. That is, it must have occurred in Proto-Sáliban.

**Table 2 Cognate Morphology Derived from Copulas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mako</th>
<th>Piaroa</th>
<th>Sáliba</th>
<th>COGNATE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>akʷa</td>
<td>-akʷ</td>
<td>-ækʷä</td>
<td>-ga/-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>ɨki</td>
<td>-ɨki</td>
<td>-yki</td>
<td>-di</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study constitutes an important contribution both to the reconstruction of Proto-Sáliban grammar and to our understanding of the role of grammaticalization in the creation of polarity and TAME verbal morphology.