

# MORPHOLOGICAL EVIDENCE FOR PRIMACY OF PATIENT AS SUBJECT IN TAGALOG

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been studies on Tagalog, a major language of the Philippines, that present strong pieces of evidence, both syntactic and psychological, for the non-universality of agent as subject. Schachter (1976, 1977), for instance, shows that there are reference-related properties for subject (i.e. grammatical subject, which may be an agent or a patient or some other nominal) as well as role-related properties (i.e. a nominal, being an agent, may undergo certain rules whether it is a grammatical subject or not). Cena (1977) discusses a whole array of syntactic structures where the patient is preferred to appear as the grammatical subject over a co-occurring agent. Along the same vein, in a language acquisition study by Galang (1982), she concludes that children learning Tagalog verbs acquire the patient or object focus first before the agent focus forms of the active verbs. In support of these studies, this paper will show that the morphological structure of verbs also indicates the primacy of patient or object over agent or experiencer as subject. Subject is taken here as that nominal in a predicative construction identified as the focus marked by *ang/si* or manifested by the nominative form of pronouns (referred to as the absolutive form in an ergative approach).

The thesis of this paper<sup>1</sup> is that a verb in its basic or unmarked morphological form indicates a basic structure and, concomitantly, a more basic relation exists between that verb form and the nominal that co-occurs with it as the subject of the sentence. This thesis draws from the theory of markedness which considers the unmarked form of an opposition as the more productive or regular form (Hyman 1975:145-146). More recently, in Mayerthaler's theory of Natural Morphology (Klausenburger 1986:328-329), he conceives of markedness as matching the principle of constructional iconicity. This principle states that "what is semantically more should also be constructionally more". From this principle, we can draw that an overt morphological marking signifies a corresponding semantic marking. Thus, where a verb stem is more complex in internal structure than another related form, it is perceived as projecting more semantic information and, therefore, is not a basic or primary structure.

While it is true that languages with an accusative system have agents as subject of unmarked verbs and, conversely, the verbs are more complex in structure when the co-

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<sup>1</sup>This is a revised version of a paper read at the Linguistic Society of America Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, California, 1979.

occurring patient is subject, there are languages where the reverse obtains. Tagalog is one such language. Although it has transitive verb stems consisting of roots that can take either the active voice affix *-um-*, or one of the patient voice affixes *-in-*, *-an* or *i-* depending on the subclass the verb belongs to, the interesting fact is that there are a number of subclasses of other transitive verb stems of the same simple structure that would only allow the patient to be the subject of the sentence. For the related verb form to inflect for the agentive voice, if this is at all permissible, the stem has to assume a more complex, derived form. In fact, the number of subclasses exhibiting this latter characteristic far exceeds that of the former. The simple underived class of transitive verbs preferring a patient subject extends over to other subcategories of lexically derived verb stems and to other so-called pseudo-verb forms. To show this, however, we have to refer to the inflection system of Tagalog verbs. In this presentation, the relevant aspect to be dealt with is the distinction between the agentive or the experiencer versus the patient or the objective voice forms of transitive verbs, in order to describe pointedly the difference between the two distinct forms.<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this paper, I do not deal with the other non-agentive or non-objective voice forms.

## 2. TAGALOG VERB INFLECTION

Tagalog verbs inflect for voice and aspect (Schachter & Otanes 1972; de Guzman 1978). Transitive verbs that take the affix *-um-* co-occur with the agent nominal as the subject. The same verb stems take *-in-*, *-an* or *i-*, depending on the subcategory, to indicate patient or objective voice, that is, the patient is the subject of the sentence. For example:

- (1) a. *humiram ang bata ng libro sa aklatan*  
 borrowed child book library  
 [+agtv]<sup>3</sup> [+NOM] [+ACC] [+OBL]  
 [+Agt] [+Pat] [+Loc]  
 the child borrowed a book from the library
- b. *hihiramin ng bata ang libro sa aklatan*  
 will borrow [+GEN] [+NOM] [+OBL]  
 [+objv] [+Agt] [+Pat] [+Loc]  
 the book will be borrowed by the child from the library / the child will  
 borrow the book from the library

There are other verb roots which are similarly marked for the agentive and the objective (patient) voices. Some of them are as follows:

<sup>2</sup>Transitive verbs treated here are those verbs that co-occur at least with an agentive or an experiencer and a patient or an object nominal.

<sup>3</sup>The following abbreviations are used throughout the paper:

a. Case relation/semantic role		Case form	
Agt	Agent	NOM	nominative
Pat	Patient	GEN	genitive
Loc	Location	OBL	oblique
Exp	Experiencer	ACC	accusative
Obj	Object		

b. The features [+caus] and [-caus] stand for causative and non-causative, respectively; [+agtv] for agentive; [+exp] for experiential; [+inch] for inchoative; [+objv] for objective.

- |     |                          |               |                            |            |
|-----|--------------------------|---------------|----------------------------|------------|
| (2) | <i>tumulong/tolongan</i> | to help       | <i>tumanggap/tanggapin</i> | to receive |
|     | <i>umabuloy/abuluyan</i> | to contribute | <i>kumain/kainin</i>       | to eat     |
|     | <i>kumuha/kunin</i>      | to get        | <i>uminom/inumin</i>       | to drink   |
|     | <i>bumili/bilhin</i>     | to buy        |                            |            |

Notice that with verbs of this type, there appears to be no discernible structural basis for choosing one or the other nominal phrase to function as subject. Both the agent and the patient are possible candidates, and in both instances the verb structure is equally simple, that is, it consists of a simple verb stem or root plus its voice affix.

Yet the more interesting groups of verbs, because they are more revealing and thus more informative, are the subclasses of transitive roots that allow the patient voice marked by *-in*, *-an* or *i-* but which never allow the formation of an agentive counterpart simply by adding the affix *-um-*. Some of these are listed below.

(3) Ditransitive verbs

- |                 |            |               |           |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|-----------|
| <i>tanungin</i> | to ask     | <i>ibigay</i> | to give   |
| <i>sabihin</i>  | to say     | <i>ilagay</i> | to put    |
| <i>iyutos</i>   | to command | <i>isauli</i> | to return |
| <i>ituro</i>    | to teach   |               |           |
- (\**tumanong*, \**sumabi*, \**umutos* etc.)

(4) Simple transitive verbs

- |                 |                 |                |             |
|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|-------------|
| <i>abangan</i>  | to watch for    | <i>sirain</i>  | to tear     |
| <i>alagaan</i>  | to take care of | <i>talupan</i> | to peel     |
| <i>bantayan</i> | to look after   | <i>punasan</i> | to wipe off |
| <i>hiwain</i>   | to slice        | <i>ilabas</i>  | to take out |
| <i>basagin</i>  | to break        | <i>iladlad</i> | to unfurl   |
- (\**umabang*, \**umalaga*, \**bumantay* etc.)

The agentive counterpart of these verb stems is better known as the *mag-* verbs, e.g. *magtanong*, *magturo*, *mag-abang*, *madhiwa*, *magtalop* etc.

In previous studies (Schachter & Otnes 1972; Ramos 1974), *mag-* verbs have usually been analysed as consisting of the active voice affix *mag-* + verb base, with *mag-* being treated as one unit complementing the active voice affix *-um-*. A reanalysis of these verbs instead into an active affix *m-* + *pag-* verb stem, however, captures two structural relationships which are concealed in the former analysis (De Guzman 1978). Firstly, *m-* rather than *mag-* is phonologically a closer and more viable alternant form of the voice affix *-um-*. It can apply generally not only to *pag-* stems but to *pang-* and *paki-* stems as well, morphophonemically resulting in *mag-*, *mang-* and *maki-* respectively, via a full nasal assimilation process. Secondly, in the same manner that a verb root can inflect for the agentive or the non-agentive voice, a *pag-* stem verb which derives from a verb root or another derived stem can also inflect for the agentive, the benefactive and the locative. For example, the derived stem *pagluto* (from *pag-* + *luto*) has the inflected forms *magluto*, *ipagluto* and *paglutuan* for the agentive, benefactive and locative voices respectively.

The class of *pag-* verb stems, then, designated for the agentive voice, among others, has a more complex morphological structure than the corresponding class of root forms which inflect for the patient voice.

## 3. DERIVED TRANSITIVE AND CAUSATIVE VERB STEMS

It may be shown further that intransitive verbs marked by *-um-*, which take either a co-occurring object or an agent (actor in some literature) as the case may be, when transitivised take two different forms to inflect for the agentive and for the patient or objective voices. By conversion, the derived transitive form is identical to the intransitive root; but this transitive root form does not allow an agentive form without using a *pag-* stem as base. Compare the verb forms below:

- (5) a. *tumakas ang bilanggo (sa bilibid)*  
 escaped prisoner prison  
 [+agtv] [+NOM] [+OBL]  
 [+Agt/Actor] [+Loc]

the prisoner escaped from prison

- b. *itinakas niya ang bilanggo sa bilibid*  
 escaped he prisoner prison  
 [+objv] [+GEN] [+NOM] [+OBL]  
 [+Agt] [+Pat] [+Loc]

the prisoner was taken away/smuggled by him from prison (lit. the prisoner was escaped by him from prison)

- c. *nagtakas<sup>4</sup> siya ng bilanggo sa bilibid*  
 [+agtv] he prisoner prison  
 [+NOM] [+ACC] [+OBL]  
 [+Agt] [+Pat] [+Loc]

he took away/smuggled a prisoner out of prison

Like the *pag-* stems derivable from roots listed in (3) and (4), the agentive voice form *nagtakas* in (5c) has a *pag-* stem derived from the derived transitive root *takas* in (5b), which manifests the patient voice, which in turn is derived from the intransitive root *takas* in (5a). Some other examples of derived transitive verbs, where a simple root takes the patient as subject and the corresponding *pag-* stem takes the agent as subject, are as follows:

- | (6) | Intransitive                 | >-> | Transitive                                 |
|-----|------------------------------|-----|--|
|     | <i>pumasok</i> to enter      |     | <i>ipasok/magpasok</i> to take s.th. in    |
|     | <i>bumalik</i> to return to  |     | <i>ibalik/magbalik</i> to return s.th. to  |
|     | <i>umikot</i> to rotate/turn |     | <i>iikot/mag-ikot</i> to turn s.th. around |
|     | <i>bumukas</i> to open       |     | <i>ibukas/magbukas</i> to open s.th.       |

The type of derivation exhibited in the process of *transitivisation* above, that is, introducing an agent to perform the act indicated by the verb upon a patient, is analogous to another more general process of derivation known as *causativisation*. A derived causative verb stem is marked with the prefix *pa-*; it can be derived from an intransitive verb stem, a transitive one or another causative stem. The derived form *pa-* + verb root is the simplest structure of causative verb stems, and while this form inflects for the patient-as-subject, it never does for the agent. To make the causative verb stem capable of co-occurring with the newly introduced agent (sometimes referred to as causer) as subject, the only alternative way is to rederive the non-agentive causative stem into the agentive stem with the affix *pag-*. Inflected

<sup>4</sup>The completed aspect form of the [*m-* + *pag-*stem] verb is expressed by the replacement of initial *m-* with *n-*.

for the agentive voice, the verb will have the form [*m-* + [*pag-* [*pa-* + verb root]]]. To illustrate:

- (7) a. *bumagsak ang bunga*  
 fell/dropped fruit  
 [-caus] [+NOM]  
 [-agtv] [+Obj]  
 the fruit fell
- b. *pababagsakin niya ang bunga*  
 will-make-fall he fruit  
 [+caus] [+GEN] [+NOM]  
 [+objv] [+Agt] [+Pat]  
 he will make the fruit fall
- c. *nagpabagsak siya ng bunga*  
 [+caus] [+NOM] [+ACC]  
 [+agtv] [+Agt] [+Pat]  
 he made a fruit fall

Similar forms can be created from transitive root sources, as in the following:

- (8) a. *bumili ang nanay ng damit*  
 bought mother dress  
 [-caus] [+NOM] [+ACC]  
 [+agtv] [+Agt] [+Pat]  
 mother bought a dress
- b. *pabibilhin ko ang nanay ng damit*<sup>5</sup>  
 cause to buy I mother dress  
 [+caus] [+GEN] [+NOM] [+ACC]  
 [+Causee] [+Agt] [+Causee] [+Pat]  
 I will make mother buy a dress
- c. *ipinabili ko sa nanay ang damit*  
 caused to be bought I mother dress  
 [+caus] [+GEN] [+OBL] [+NOM]  
 [+objv] [+Agt] [+Causee] [+Pat]  
 I had mother buy the dress
- d. *nagpabili ako sa nanay ng damit*  
 caused to buy I mother dress  
 [+caus] [+NOM] [+OBL] [+ACC]  
 [+agtv] [+Agt] [+Causee] [+Pat]  
 I asked mother to buy a dress (for me)

#### 4. PSYCHOLOGICAL OR EXPERIENTIAL VERBS

With psychological or experiential verbs, the experiencer in place of an agent co-occurs with an object or stimulus instead of a patient. Unlike the patient nominal, which is

<sup>5</sup>It will be observed that the nominal marked [+Causee] co-occurring with the causative verb functions like that of a patient or object as shown by the objective voice marker *-in*.

semantically the object affected by the action the agent performs on it, the object co-occurring with a psychological verb is unaffected; it is acting as a stimulus responsible for what the experiencer perceives or feels. If we assume that the agent is more primary than the patient in being used as the grammatical subject, we would likewise expect the experiencer to be primary over that of the object in this type of transitive verb. Correspondingly, the morphological structure of the experiencer (or dative) voice form should be simpler than that of the relative objective voice form. We find these assumptions true of only a small subclass of verbs which may be labelled emotion verbs. The structure may be described as consisting of the affix *ma-* + root. For example:

- (9)     *natakot*    *ang bata*        (*sa aso*)  
           feared        child            dog  
           [+stative]    [+NOM]        [+OBL]  
           [+exp]        [+Exp]        [+Obj]  
           the child was afraid (of the dog)

- (10)    *nahiya*        *ang bata*        (*sa bisita*)  
           embarrassed    child            guest  
           [+stative]        [+NOM]        [+OBL]  
           [+exp]        [+Exp]        [+Obj]  
           the child felt shy (towards the guest) (lit. the child was embarrassed  
           before the guest)

To show the corresponding objective voice forms of the verbs above, we have the following sentences in which the verb forms are made up of a more complex structure [[*ka-* stem] + *-an*]:

- (9) a.   *kinatakutan ng bata ang aso*  
           [+stative]    [+GEN]        [+NOM]  
           [+objv]        [+Exp]        [+Obj]  
           the child feared the dog

- (10) b. *kinahiyaan ng bata ang bisita*  
           [+stative]    [+GEN]        [+NOM]  
           [+objv]        [+Exp]        [Obj]  
           the child felt shy towards the guest

Other verbs that belong to this category of emotion verbs are as follows:

- (11)    *magalit*    be angry with                    *mayamot*    be annoyed with  
           *matuwa*    be delighted with                *masuya*     be satiated with  
           *mainis*     be irritated with                 *masuklam*   be disgusted with

On the other hand, the majority of psychological verbs have the same form, *ma-* + root, but they select the object nominal as the grammatical subject. To make the co-occurring experiencer subject of the sentence, the affix *ma-* has to attach to the more complex stem form with the *ka-* prefix.<sup>6</sup> We can compare the objective voice forms with [*ma-* + root] and the corresponding experiencer forms with [*ma-* + [*ka-*stem]] in the following examples:

<sup>6</sup>Note that the prefixes *ma-* and *maka-* are not identified as voice affixes but as derivationals indicating a stative or a psychological type of verb. It will be observed that both the objective and experience voice forms manifest this *ma-* affix. The experiencer form is considered more complex in that it can be analysed as *ma-* +

- (12) a. *nakita ng mga bata ang palabas*  
 saw PLURAL child show  
 [+stative] [+GEN] [+NOM]  
 [+objv] [+Exp] [+Obj]  
 the children saw the show / the show was seen by the children
- b. *nakakita ang mga bata ng palabas*  
 saw PLURAL child show  
 [+stative] [+NOM] [+ACC]  
 [+exp] [+Exp] [+Obj]  
 the children saw a show

Other verbs that fall into this subclass, showing their objective and experiencer voice forms with the same structure as above, are as follows:

- (13) *marinig/makarinig* to hear  
*matanaw/makatanaw* to see/view  
*maalala/makaalala* to remember  
*mabatid/makabatid* to know  
*mahalata/makahalata* to detect from someone's behaviour  
*maramdam(an)/makaramdam* to feel or sense something

It appears that the more complex verb form with [*ma-* + [*ka-stem*]] is distinct enough to identify the experiencer (or dative) voice in contrast with the simpler object voice form [*ma-* + root]. This complex voice form is therefore seen as being analogous to the agentive voice in which the *ma-* affix seems to correspond to a psychological feature, that is, stative or emotion or perception, and the distinction in terms of the structure of the stem, whether a root or a *ka-stem*, to which this *ma-* affix is attached signals the difference between objective and experiencer voice forms respectively. Thus, in transitive active verbs as well as in transitive psychological verbs, the patient or the objective voice form is invariably simpler in internal structure, that is, root + affix or affix + root, than the agentive or experiencer counterpart, which usually takes an affix + affixed-stem (with *pag-*, *pang-*, *paki-* or *ka-*).

## 5. TRANSITIVE VERBS DERIVED FROM ADJECTIVES AND NOUNS

Similar to derived transitive and causative verbs, transitive verbs which are derived from adjectives and nouns occur in their simplest stem form when the co-occurring grammatical subject is the patient or object and not the agent. For example:

- (14) Verbs of provocation
- |              |          |                |   |
|--------------|----------|----------------|---|
| <i>takot</i> | fear     | <i>takutin</i> | to scare s.o.                                 |
| <i>galit</i> | anger    | <i>galitin</i> | to make s.o angry                             |
| <i>inis</i>  | contempt | <i>inisin</i>  | to irritate s.o./to make s.o.<br>contemptuous |
| <i>gulat</i> | surprise | <i>gulatin</i> | to surprise s.o.                              |







- (19) a. *gusto ko ng ubas*  
 like I grapes  
 [+stative] [+GEN] [+ACC]  
 [+Exp] [+Obj]  
 I like grapes
- b. *gusto ko ang ubas (hindi ang mansanas)*  
 like I grapes not apples  
 [+stative] [+GEN] [+NOM]  
 [+Exp] [+Obj]  
 I like the grapes (not the apples)

Some other pseudo-verbs which exhibit the same syntactic behaviour are:

- (20) *ibig* want/desire *nais* desire  
*ayaw* don't like/don't want *kailangan* need

Another set of state verbs similar in form to the preceding type can occur without a voice affix only when the patient is the co-occurring subject. For example:

- (21) *akay ni Berto ang bata*  
 led-by-hand child  
 [-caus] [+GEN] [+NOM]  
 [+stative] [+Agt/Exp] [+Pat/Obj]  
 the child is led by the hand by Berto
- (22) *pasan ng lalaki ang isang sakong bigas*  
 carried on back man one sack rice  
 [-caus] [+GEN] [+NOM]  
 [+stative] [+Agt/Exp] [+Pat/Obj]  
 a sack of rice is carried on his back by the man

Other verbs of this type are as follows:

- (23) *hawak* held in hand *ari?* possessed; owned  
*dala* carried *sakop* covered; included; in domain of  
*taban* handled; grasped *mahal* loved

## 7. CONCLUSION

From the point of view of morphological formation, voice inflection in particular, the analysis of the agentive voice form as consisting of the allomorph *m-* (an alternant of the active voice affix *-um-*) plus a *pag-* stem provides a clear contrast in structural complexity with that of the patient voice form which is made up of the voice affix *-in-*, *-an* or *i-* and a root. Likewise with state verbs that take [*ma-* + root] versus [*ma-* + *ka-* stem] to indicate an objective voice and an experiencer voice respectively, the form is obviously comparatively simpler than the latter. In sum, based on the number of subtypes of verbs that have been presented here showing the objective or patient voice forms as being simpler or less marked in internal structure than their corresponding agentive or experiencer voice forms, if such forms are permitted, it is safe to conclude that morphologically, the patient or object is the nominal favoured or preferred to function as the grammatical subject in a Tagalog predicative sentence.

One implication that may be drawn from this conclusion with reference to typology is that Tagalog, manifesting verb roots that take either agent or patient as subject as well as verb roots that take only patient as subject, may be regarded synchronically as a mixed ergative-accusative type, that is, where the patient as subject co-occurs with the unmarked or least marked verb stem; and that the development of the accusative system started with the active affix *-um-* operating in certain classes of transitive verbs along with the creation of a productive activation rule. This rule presumably gave rise to *pag-* and *pang-* stems and, simultaneously, to the alternant affix *m-* of the earlier active voice affix *-um-*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>There are recent works that analyse Tagalog and other Philippine languages as belonging to the ergative type of languages (Gerdts 1988; De Guzman 1988; Rowsell 1983), and consequently the terms used in those papers for the nominal case marking do not correspond to the labels in this paper.